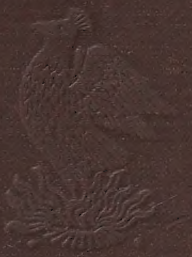

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IN THE BEGINNING

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IN THE BEGINNING

By

NORMAN DOUGLAS

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To

JOHN MAVROGORDATO

IN THE BEGINNING

ALONG that broad and languid stream were few human habitations ; only a fisherman's hut here and there on some sandy reach, with a black tub, his boat, drawn up on the shore or tethered to stakes in the grey-green water. At no great distance inland stood a collection of reed-cabins plastered together with dried mud and bitumen : a village.

The rest of the banks, above and below this settled region, were covered with tracts of luscious jungle seldom entered by men. There lived lions and other monsters ; a good many folk had been devoured by them. Others, younger and prettier ones, imprudently venturing within, had disappeared in other fashion, had been witched away by some love-sick deity. For those were days when Immortals sought pleasure where they found it—not only in their own Celestial Halls but among the sons and daughters of earth ; days when mankind thereabouts walked naked without shame, and the thing called Sin had not yet been invented.

Close to the hut of Ayra's father was a thicket

of trees at whose foot the stream took a bend, and then rolled grandly forward.

Linus was drawing the maiden Ayra, his dearest friend, from the sunlight into its cool shade. Somehow or other, he could never keep away from her. Yet he was not certain of how he should act today, being even more simple-minded than she. So he pushed and pulled her along, none too gently. And not unobserved; for out there, in water that reached to his middle, was the girl's father, a bronzed and muscular figure, moving landwards as he drew some nets out of the current. He shook his head a little dubiously as he watched the pair, and went on with the work.

Now they had entered the green recess and reached that favourite nook where often, for hours on end, they had played and talked, and sometimes fought, together, within sound of the swirling waters. The tender girl knew something of human love, though little enough. She had blossomed into maidenhood a few months ago, and her swelling breasts could be hidden within her own small hands. The other, young as she, knew barely as much. He felt a need; the rest, he thought, should come of itself.

'This time, yes!' he was saying to his heart. And soon his arm began to encircle her warm

waist and to press upon the hips, endeavouring to draw her earthwards. That falter in his voice, that bewildered glance, inspired Ayra with more fear than joy. Once already had he behaved after this fashion. He was hardly in earnest on that occasion ; only playing ; and she escaped easily from his hands and ran laughing into the sunshine. Today he was changed ; stronger and yet fairer to see. Or had she grown more weak ? She felt as never before.

' Another day,' she murmured. ' Oh, Linus, another day.'

' Now ! '

He shook off his sole garment, the wintry cloak of sheepskin which hung about his shoulders. It slid to the ground, and he stood before her. There was nothing unlovely in the sight. The child was there, lingering on the borderland of youth ; no down had appeared on his smooth cheek, and from the curls that drooped over those calm brown eyes—from there, along the whole length of his body down to the rounded wrists and ankles—Linus was without a blemish : an apparition to disquiet any maiden. No wonder, considering who his sire had been.

Ayra trembled at the tense revealment as at her destiny. And before she had time to

recover from the spell, he grasped her more firmly than ever, and drew her down.

'Another day,' she still faltered, her strength fast ebbing. Then, overcome with sudden terror, she thrust one palm forcefully under his chin and closed her fingers about the throat, driving his head backwards. They struggled; and while they yet struggled, the muscles of Linus relaxed. The world went out.

They found their voices again. There was laughter in Ayra's eyes. She said:

'I hurt your pretty throat. Look! The marks of my fingers.'

'No matter. I will go home now,' he added in his usual abrupt fashion.

'First put on your cloak. Here it is. I won the fight, didn't I?'

'Another day,' said Linus. He left her then and there, as a young half-god leaves a mortal, and walked down the stream towards his cottage, fairly well satisfied with himself. 'Next time, yes,' he thought. Ayra, after this, began to grow pale from that sweet want.

Now she issued from the thicket, and saw her father on the bank. He had pulled the nets ashore; he was washing the brown river-slime off his calves. She drew near and sat down beside him. He remarked cheerily:

'Will that boy never come to his wits?'

'Shall I say it, father? He is a little rough; gentler with his horses than with Ayra. And yet——'

'No harm in a little roughness. But tell me this. Who knows more about our fish than I do, about their different kinds and colours and shapes, and how and when and where to catch them? Who knows more than your father?'

'Nobody.'

Thereupon the old man slapped with pleasure a hairy thigh—that thigh still bearing the prints of the crocodile's teeth which had once all but dragged him down into the miry depths. He stretched himself out beside his daughter and began stroking his grey beard.

'Nobody,' he echoed. 'Nobody knows more! And now listen. Three days ago this boy of yours spoke to me of a certain fish he saw speeding up water, a fish such as your father has never yet seen in all his long life. Prodigious in size, he said, and tinted like this cloudless sky; its head and back out of the water——'

'A fish in air?'

'It paused near where he sat looking up stream, and surveyed him oddly. Surveyed him with a smile, he told me. Then melted

away, flashing along like a sunbeam. Now what do you think, my girl? How about his wits? Fish or no fish, we must mend his insight before you can take him to yourself.'

Ayra pondered awhile. She said:

'A dreamy boy. Perhaps he was dreaming. Or maybe—maybe he saw some Immortal.' She felt suddenly sad at the thought that a deity might have gazed with fondness on her friend; then laughed again.

'Fish or no fish, he rides beautifully and will find his wits soon enough.'

'As to riding, that grandmother of his clings faster to a horse than any man yet born. One would say she was part of the beast itself. Lucky the old woman is still alive to take care of him. She will not last for ever,' he went on. 'And what then?'

'He comes here.'

'You are ready. Is he?'

'Leave that to Ayra.'

'Well, well! Now bring these indoors, every one of them,' he added, rising and pointing to a pile of olba-fishes and silvery gliffinks.

LINUS meanwhile walked homewards along the river-bank. He had forgotten Ayra ; he was thinking of his horses.

Soon the chill weather would be quite gone and then, first of all—away with that irksome sheepskin ! He would watch it float down stream like last year, and laugh, and be himself altogether. Spring was at hand when the horses, every one of them, grew sleek and frisky in the new herbage, while the plain covered itself with blossoms of many hues ; scarlet flamingoes then arrived from far away, and flocks of doves travelled up stream with rush of wing, and long-billed water-fowl stood by the shore, planted pensively on one leg. Then, at daybreak, the larks would trill so rapturously that the blue sky throbbed with their music ; then, at nightfall, those playful prickle-pigs crept shyly out of their cane-brakes and scampered about the sand. A goodly season !

Later on, the stream would begin to forget its old sluggishness and grow turbid, writhing and raging and coiling upon itself, and bearing on its bosom a forest of uprooted tree-trunks, their

green leaves and branches all enmeshed in one another—for what reason? Nobody knew. Whence came the flood? Whither went it? Nobody knew. Men had ridden up water and down water for many long leagues, and encountered nothing different from what was here: jungle and plain and swamp, and habitations of other creatures like themselves.

So broad was this river that sometimes the flat shores out yonder were wreathed in mists that cleared away only at noon, and swallows skimming the surface seemed to glide away into another world. At present the air was not of this hazy kind; one thought to descry every bush and every tussock of grass over there. And Linus, looking across, saw what he had often seen before—jagged spires of dazzling whiteness, a long row of them, halfway up the sky. They might have been strangely fashioned clouds, save that they always sat in the same part of the heavens. None knew them to be a mighty range of mountains ever so far away, their lower regions wrapped in the fog of immeasurable distance, though many had puzzled and puzzled about the matter.

Linus, and he alone of all those folk, had more than once seen something else as well: the Shape of a lusty fellow-creature who stalked

bravely through the sky across that glittering bulwark. What could the vision be? The Second One, he sometimes thought, might know about it, though he was apt to talk foolishly at times.

Just then he saw the Second One, coming down from the village past that grove of blue-green acacia trees by the riverside. He was the middle eldest of the Old Three who decided upon the affairs of the villagers and settled all their disputes; he was also the only male relative of Linus—his grandmother's brother. This Second One happened to be dwarfish, sickly in health, and not over-wise; not nearly so wise nor so strong as his tough old sister, though twenty years younger than she. He wore a covering even in summer on account of certain aches and pains, a fashion which did not raise him in the esteem of his friends, and his malady made him fretful and peevish. At that moment he seemed to be in good humour. He said:

'We often meet here, don't we, Linus? And now we will march together, if you go slowly. I am bringing my ancient sister this cake from the village furnace; it is unusually good today.'

'One bite,' said Linus.

'That was a very large one. Enough, enough! You are looking prettier than ever. And how you grow! What it is to be young and to feel the sap rising upwards in the veins! I know where you have come from,' he added slyly.

'You know everything, old uncle.'

'Not quite everything, but more than many others do. My father used to say: "That child knows too much." Has any one ever said the same to you? Are you outgrowing your simplicity? Why, when I was a boy of your age, I used to——'

'See, there are those sharp white teeth in the sky again, always in the same place. What may they be?'

The Second One began to laugh.

'What may they be?' he echoed. 'Nothing! A tree-shadow on the water—there it is, but can you hack off its branches? Or the wind—there it is; can you catch it in your hand? Whatever those teeth may be, they are nothing. Never trouble about nothing.'

Linus persisted:

'Then what of the figure of a man in the sky shouldering his way across them? Nothing again? Or some deity?'

'O child, that so comely a head should hold

so little sense ! Will you never come to your wits ? And regarding those miserable deities—ai, ai ! ' he suddenly cried out, holding one hand to his hip. ' A fearful twinge of pain ! It is Thwartis the ague-demon, pinching me for what I was going to say about the gods. He pinches horribly, bless him. The good Thwartis ! Do it again ! Do it as often as you please.'

' Does it hurt ? '

' Better now. You see what a pleasant life they lead, the gods ; they do as they please, and their fun is not at all our fun ; oh, not at all. They kill us for fun, and pinch us for fun —ai ! another twinge. I must now hobble home and get my women to rub the place with snake-fat. After that, I come down to you. Grandmother well ? '

' Always well.'

SHE was always well. She seemed to be everlasting. Linus had never known her to be otherwise than a sinewy old mortal stained mud-colour by ages of rain and sun ; one who galloped mother-naked about the plain, her withered breasts flapping in front and white hair streaming behind as she drove the foals hither and thither ; who, thrown to the ground, bounced up like a feather and was on their backs in a twinkling. The tales she told of gods and mortals ! And the cheeses she made ! Such an old woman there never was.

His father perished years ago in the same pestilence which carried off Ayra's mother and half the village as well ; as to his own mother—she, hardly more than a child, had died painlessly, in mysterious fashion, with dim words and a smile on her lips, at the moment of giving birth to Linus : a rare and lovely death ! So he lived alone with that leathery old thing, his mother's mother. Harsh and savage to every one else, she used a more than common affection towards this child, and worked for him who should have worked for her, and never

crossed his wishes, and counted as nothing his dreamy forgetfulness. She spoke to him always in words of love, and often, as he knelt before her, would take his chin in her hand, all silently, and gaze with a kind of reverence into his face. She may have known, she must have known, what was hidden from the rest of them.

Linus was thinking of this curious manner of hers just then, as he walked along. 'What can she mean by it?' he marvelled. 'Has she some secret? One of these days, perhaps, she may tell me. No!' he decided. 'This very night I will ask her.'

So musing, he found himself at the turn of the river near which stood their one-roomed hut out of reach of spring floods. Here, under that gigantic white poplar where the wild mint grew, she often waited for him. She was not there. But the horses, grazing on the plain, threw their heads upwards and sniffed, and espied their friend, and trooped to greet him. They thronged around with soft whinnyings of joy, while he drew their shaggy heads to his breast, caressing them. Only some of the colts, the half-tame ones, kept apart distrustfully; they had memories of his unpleasant weight and the grip of his leg about their bellies. And the

sheep too, all in a bunch up there, never so much as raised their heads, but went on with their endless nibbling.

It was hard to tear himself away from these favourites. He lingered long. Then, feeling a sudden pang of hunger—' let me through ! ' he said, as they still clustered about him.

She was not at the cottage door. He entered and glanced within. There she lay, and never rose to bid him welcome. Not a word . . . He spoke to her. She remained voiceless, motionless, in her corner.

Dead ? he wondered, and looked around with surprise. All things were in their place ; seldom had the hovel been made to look so trim. The fire was carefully banked up with ashes, and beside it lay a heap of fresh loaves, more than she was accustomed to bake at one time As to dying—she had not once hinted at such a possibility. She was only fast, fast asleep. He drew near to touch her face. Stone-cold and dead she was, she who seemed everlasting. Her mouth was agape, and there had stolen a fearsome stare into her eyes. Can she have beheld, in a final moment of enlightenment, the shadowy outline of Nipso the soul-snatcher, bending over the couch to claw uo the precious burden of her last breath ?

Linus broke from the dusky cottage in terror and despair.

Confronting him were those blanched crests all radiant against the pallid sky of evening. They caught his gaze, looming up there. At the same instant the Shape came again. It was a robust and bearded oldster grasping a club ; the crown of his head touched the zenith, and the whole huge apparition glowed like a hot ember in the last rays of the Sun. He crossed in oblique fashion that proud barrier, travelling faster than the Wind—footing it gloriously over the pinnacles. At the extreme verge he paused, and glanced back over his shoulders with mirthful countenance towards the regions he was leaving ; then vanished into the cloudy North.

Linus, entranced, waited for the familiar Sound which always followed the Figure and always gave him strange comfort. It came : the voice of the Earth-god, laughing melodiously to himself at the other end of the world. He was returning over the mountains from one of his visits to the land of the Colocynthians who faced the rising Sun ; he had enjoyed some little sport, that afternoon, among those supercilious people. Little thought Linus that soon he would be crossing

the same proud barrier in the same Divine company !

And while his ears were yet ringing with the lovely laughter another sound assailed them, a sound of human footsteps. The Second One, his grandmother's younger brother, stood beside him, cured for the moment of his aches and pains.

THE Earth-god was not so fond of those Colocynthians as he might have been. They invented a nickname which annoyed him. They also had ideas not to his taste ; they painted their cheeks, and powdered their long hair with lyxas-dust, and toddled about delicately in trailing gowns and silver-tipped shoes, thinking wondrous well of themselves and still better of their Ruler, the Nameless One, who reclined all alone like a golden egg among his snowy Tarbinjoram blossoms, devising schemes for their prosperity.

Moreover, every inch of their vast land had been tilled time out of mind ; water-channels flowed through a myriad patches of cultivation; whereas here, in his own domain, the ground lay bare for more than a hundred days' journey in every direction. To a lover of teeming fruitfulness, one who had finally routed and emprisoned the red demon Aroudi, implacable enemy of ordered life, these Colocynthians, despite their airs and graces, should have been a delight. Instead of teasing them, he might well have encouraged their peaceful tillage.

How should this wayward Immortal resist the temptation of amusing himself in his own deplorable fashion ?

It was his habit therefore, and one of his many pastimes, to visit their country at intervals and there to stamp with his club, ever so lightly, upon the soil. Then could be heard a mighty rumble, and down would topple a rich shrine or two, and sometimes more, while his own sides shook with laughter. He found it rich sport to see these superior people scuttling out of their pink towers and crawling for refuge into tufts of feather-cane whose matted roots, on such occasions, shivered and swayed like wood on stormy water, but never cracked. There, in those green shelters, they used to crouch and curse him with objectionable imprecations, while the storm rolled over. Then they sallied forth to view the mischief, holding their pale, pointed fingers skyward in disgust and consternation.

'Ah,' they complained grumpily—'and ah! he only comes here to look at us, because we are so handsome and refined, and have such beautiful plantations. We are, without a doubt, the Heavenly People. We are the oldest and best of mortals. And ah! he never goes away without scaring us out of our wits and smashing

a few of our temples, or nipping the corner off some gilded shambangoo which has cost years and years of patient labour. The freak, the clattering bungler ! Cannot he leave us in peace ? May his horrid tail rot off.'

So they spoke. Once long ago, with a view to making him more friendly, they were on the point of raising in his honour a splendid sanctuary. Then their wisest and most fastidious old man said : ' He will only tumble it. Why waste good money ? ' The project was abandoned. They called him, in their language, O-Boum, which signifies ' The Clatterer ' ; and this nickname was caught up one day by the Wind, the divine messenger and chatterbox, as he loitered in a warm eddy about their flower-beds, and carried by him to the Celestial Halls. It amused the Immortals. It made them laugh. They called him O-Boum ever afterwards.

They lived up there in a golden content, deathless and not passionless, answerable to none, ready to laugh at anything, and thriving on the fear and flattery of mortals. Theirs was the prerogative of perpetual enjoyment, a state of affairs which would have become a weariness to the happiest of men even in those olden days before the Great Father, in his widsom, damned

them with a curse of satiety of which the gods knew nothing. This was one of his many achievements ; and it is to his credit that he tempered the harsh decree with a permission to do the same thing over and over again and, though knowing it to be the same, to call it each time by a different name, wherefrom they extracted a few sad grains of pleasure.

Unnumbered multitudes of deities peopled these upper regions and the middle spaces of the sky. The earth also was thronged with divine existences fair or foul, seen or unseen, friendly or unfriendly to men—those of the tormenting or rancorous kind who sent diseases, others that cured them, those that quickened the seeds or caused water to flow from rocky clefts or curdled the milk in its wooden bowl or sat laughing in the chalice of every flower ; cloud and fire demons, and fierce animal shapes, and rock-furies, and moist ones under water with moss-green hair ; terrifying spectres of a thousand kinds lurking about dark places, chattering to mortals through dreams, or sitting astride their breasts in slumber. God-children too there were, offspring of tender dalliance between Heaven and earth, many upraised to the Celestial Mansions, others condemned, through over-great admixture of impurity, to

reside below and then, each in his turn, to encounter that death to which all mortals are subject. Meanwhile they lived on earth, fair to behold but, like their divine parents, lazy and forgetful for the most part, when not actually mischievous.

Now whatever the rule of conduct of the Immortals may have been, it was not that of human kind, who had learnt moderation in a bitter school—from the immoderation of these, their masters. Victims of divine freakishness, men lived down there in harassment and humiliation. They toiled and suffered and died. resigned to all the caprices of their deities and endeavouring by every possible means to propitiate them. Often successfully, since those overhead were avid of praise and, for all their humours, not without certain streaks of kindliness. But forgetful, dreadfully forgetful! Not long ago the sailor Serchis had been rescued from shipwreck by his protectress Menetha, the maiden Goddess of Wisdom, whom he had never yet invoked in vain and who now upheld him for three days in the raging waters, only to let him be devoured by some wild beast after he had set foot on land and was already within sight of his home. Three days ! So soon had she forgotten her old favourite.

That was because she had found a new one, among her own companions. Yes ; Menetha the Maiden, the fair-haired Putter-to-rights-of-everything, cleverest of she-gods, for the first time felt the pangs of love.

She had entered upon a friendship with the young Moon.

THERE was infinite mirth over this event in the Celestial Halls, for they were convinced that the Moon, and he alone of Immortals, was sterile, and subject to convulsions. The Earth-god, who, in the matter of fertility, never tired of setting a good example to deities and mortals alike, laughed more heartily than the rest of them ; that chaste virgin had often hinted disparagingly at his merry diversions. Now she was silenced ; entangled, herself, in the toils of passion. Not that she failed to explain the adventure with her customary shrewdness, declaring that this love was of the other kind, and based on nothing but a growing pity for the Moon's infirmities and lonely, nocturnal habits of life. O-Boum remarked :

' In any case, Menetha, it was clever of you to have chosen the only lover among us who, whatever happens, will never procure you the pangs of childbirth. Are they really so terrible, I wonder ? '

' She has done well,' said the Great Mother. ' Come, Menetha, take no heed of the Clatterer! What does he know of those pains ? He laughs

at the anguish we poor Goddesses must undergo. If you have really chosen as they say, it is only one more proof of your unerring wisdom. Furthermore, you show good taste in selecting a friend among your equals. There has been too much mixing with mortality of late. These spacious Halls are full of new creatures, charming to look upon, I confess, but exhaling a faint odour of death, and if the trouble does not abate, we shall positively be driven out of our own abode. Now what may the dear Moon have to say to all this ? '

The young Moon replied in his thin, squeaky voice :

' So far as I am concerned, Mother dear, there is nothing in the story whatever. Menetha, for ages past, has been more than kind to me, and I love her for it. Why should they laugh at us on that account ? As to the babbling busybody, whoever it may have been, that brought the tale up here—let me catch sight of him—— ! '

' It must have been the Wind,' said one of them. ' He is always making mischief with his silly gossip. He ought to be bottled up again, like last time.'

' Bottle him up, bottle him up ! ' cried several others.

'Roll him about! Where is he?'

'Whoever it was,' continued the Moon, 'let me only glimpse his shadow! He shall learn how it tastes to be struck by my beams. Why, at the moment when he avows that he saw what he saw, I was having a fit.'

How they laughed at this!

'The sly youngster,' said O-Boum, the Earth-god. 'He was indulging in a fit. Know ye, Immortals, that there are fits and fits, and some are not altogether unpleasant. I will ask the Sun about this particular one. He has seen every fit that ever happened.'

The other retorted icily:

'It is not the first time, you Clatterer, that you have taunted me with my infirmities. If I am to be mocked any longer in this fashion, I will put out my light for ever and ever. I swear it by the life of Hapso'—and with this, the most sacred oath of the Gods, he pointed upwards to where, all apart from the assembly, sat the undying Vulture on his naked tree. There he sat, Hapso the loathly fowl, in sight of all the Immortals, as though to remind them that ugliness can be found in every place; there he sat, craning his arched neck and fluttering down from time to time to gobble up the relics of their endless banquets.

'You heard my oath, all of you?'

'How like our Moon!' remarked the Earth-god. 'Always cross and ready to take offence. What have you to complain of, my friend, now that you have bewitched the wisest of our damsels?'

'Let us make an end of this,' said the Great Mother. 'The Moon is right. Our unhappy boy has suffered since his birth, and none of the others regard his pains. You, Menetha, be with him as often as your duties allow. Give him all the affection and comfort you can; nobody feels for him as you do. Put-him-to-rights, and let them talk and laugh. It is not passion as they understand it. Even if it were, your Mother would love both of you none the less.'

'And our clattering bungler here,' added the Moon, 'might learn to pay some attention to his own affairs instead of meddling with mine. He could occupy himself, for instance, in planting and populating that level tract of earth down there, which now lies fallow for more than a hundred days' journey in every direction. I glittered over the region last night and threw my rays upon its broad and languid river: how sad it looked! A desolation, with unclad mortals here and there, a scanty patch of corn,

and half-wild sheep and horses ; an eyesore ! But O-Boum is busy. He has more important things to do. Oh, he is dreadfully busy ! He must go and tease the tidy Colocynthians, because he is jealous of their gardens.'

'Tease the Colocynthians !' echoed the others.

'I cannot help it, Moon. They are such tiresome and fussy people. They also invented that nickname which annoys me. You are right, however, in the matter of that plain. The sight of its bleakness mortifies me more than I can say. But, O Moon, these tasks require time and up to a short while ago the fiend Aroudi, the wild one, was so bitter an opponent of my efforts that—would you believe it? I actually once deigned to consult that decrepit old Satyr, the bull-faced Nea-huni, as to what should be done about him. To such shifts are we Immortals brought ! It was thanks to Nea-huni's advice, in fact, that I was able to pin down the red monster, who now lies bellowing with rage in my workshop under fifty leagues of black mountain. The contest, even then, was no laughing matter. Did you, I wonder, ever indulge in such a fit of strength?'

'Have done with my weaknesses, O-Boum !

And if you are still in a mocking temper go to Eskion, that dusky old place; go to Eskion and see what has happened to Derco, our amorous Fish. I glanced into her shrine two nights ago and saw her lying there, aflame and panting, sick with love; and the townsmen all perishing of heat. She has cast her lustful roving eye, as usual, upon some son of earth—one of your own pretty darlings, I daresay; she too does not relish the pangs of childbirth. That is why she frolics only with mortals.'

'You are right, my child,' said the Great Mother. 'She has often told me that she dreads those pangs more than the rest of us do. But she will have to feel them all the same! I am sure she will find her master in the end, and perhaps sooner than she imagines.'

The Moon continued:

'To think that men of Eskion take her for a maiden! These mortals . . . Now, O-Boum, this love-fit of Derco's is of the kind to rejoice your gross humours. But to me say no more about fits: I dislike the word. Or ask Him who made me. Look! There he reclines before us . . . Tell him, Father, why you fashioned me with fits?'

No answer was vouchsafed.

The Great Father seldom spoke nowadays,

and when he did, it was only to put off the solution of some urgent problem. He had long since refused to preside at their boisterous banquets. Save during moments of angry or pleasurable excitement he remained in sour mood, forgetful of his mellow joviality and almost withdrawn from the assembly—shrouded, that is, in a starry mist which allowed nothing but the merest glimpse of his lineaments to appear ; a mist that was pierced, ever and anon, by one stainless hand emerging to grasp a goblet full of Myût, the drink of the Gods which, as it percolated his essence, drove a roseate shudder through those exquisite outlines. The divine sulkiness had now lasted many thousand years. When would it end? Not until those temples in several lands, ruined or neglected, should once more be repaired and thronged with worshippers. He was pining for the adoration paid in former days, and since withheld. Meanwhile he sat aloof, and laid aside all his old creative phantasies and those merry pranks that delighted both Gods and mortals, and bade the ages roll along as they pleased.

As for the others, they caroused up there, ever ready to make sport of men, ever ready for love and laughter, in that golden content ; a

THAT old grandmother was burnt at midday by the riverbank, according to custom. Lean as a stick, she gave no trouble. They collected a square heap of fuel, dry branches and last autumn's canes, enclosed it by withies between posts of green timber, stamped it down and piled on more and more, poured many a pitcher of bitumen over it, lifted her atop, and set fire to the four flanks. Then all withdrew to windward of the blaze, and watched. They saw the sparks flickering within the sapless mass, darting hither and thither and gaining strength as they climbed cheerily upwards till the sunny heaven was licked with tongues of flame, while black smoke rolled in noisome wreaths about them ; they heard the snapping of her joints and the sharp hiss of whatever flesh had covered her body. Now all was white with heat and the fiery structure stood erect, as though built for ever ; then, with a crackling noise, collapsed between its seared supports and there lay glowing, smouldering. Grey ashes arrived. They hid away the embers. The villagers dispersed to their homes.

Ayra lingered some paces behind her father, waiting for Linus.

He, having witnessed the ceremonial in tearful amazement, was about to address her when he felt a touch on his arm. It was the First One who said, in kindly but compelling fashion :

'We would like to speak with you, Linus. Come up to the grove with us.'

This First One was by far the oldest of the Three, uncommonly stout of figure and famous for good health and intelligence. Silvery-grey hairs, which refused to grow white, drooped down to his shoulders and covered, with a kind of mist, the man's whole trunk and ruddy limbs.

They moved along the river, Linus and this First One and the Second One, that rather foolish one, his dead grandmother's only brother. Soon they reached the grove of pendulous acacia trees, a shady spot by the water's edge where the village children were always playing and where, at one corner, the three Old Ones had a place apart for purposes of consultation. They sat down on some decayed trunks. The Second One enquired :

'Now why have you brought us here ?'

'I wish the Third One could have come too,' the other began, without taking any notice of the question. 'But he is lying ill. We must do

without him. What I have to tell you, boy, is this : Your grandmother forced me to promise many years ago, and just now again, when she rode so wonderfully to my cottage a few hours before her death, that you should be taken to the great oracle Nea-huni after her burning, and without delay. You must go.'

'What is this?' asked the Second One angrily. 'Linus is my flesh and blood, and be sure I shall never take him there.'

'Then I must do so.'

'Why did she never speak to me about the matter?'

'Who can say?'

It was not difficult to guess why the old woman had not consulted her brother. She distrusted his common sense.

'Nea-huni!' retorted the Second One with contempt. 'That bottomless deceit! I think I know more about his oracle than either of you do.'

'What do you know of him, uncle?' asked Linus, who had never heard of Nea-huni.

The other replied, turning to the First One :

'Let me tell you something that I have not yet told you or anybody else. After that, you may judge for yourself. When I was a sickly child and hardly able to run, my parents took

me there, hoping they might learn how to cure me. I passed a night or two alone with the monster, as is, or was, the custom ; though I remember nothing about him save that he had the horns of a bull and nearly starved me to death. Later on, when I was grown into a man, my father told me what happened ; he repeated to me the oracle's very words. The bull-faced thing said to my parents—he said——' the Second One hesitated.

' What did he say ? '

' His words are so perverse that I hardly like to utter them ! He said to my parents : " This boy may be thrown to the crocodiles. Now eat the herb I am giving you, and then try to make a better one." Those were his words. They ate the herb, or attempted to eat it, but, as you know, no other child ever came. Now what would have occurred, I wonder, if they had obeyed his commands ? I, the Second One, would not be alive to direct the affairs of the village.'

The First One said :

' You were only chosen, you remember, out of respect for your parents who, I think, would have done better if they had acted as the oracle told them. Because then, perhaps, another and a stronger child might have arrived.'

The other went on, scornfully :

'So much for Nea-huni. That half-divine Satyr, as they call him, may well be old as the hills. And yet he is more ignorant than a new-born infant, and as savage as any wolf into the bargain. Why, every one knows that he has lately taken to crunching up his visitors——'

'Has he?' enquired Linus of the First One. 'Because, if he has——'

'No, my child. He eats nothing but plants. Don't listen to this talk. Your grandmother loved you more dearly than her own life, and she was never wrong. She had good reasons for everything she said or did. Are you afraid to go with me?'

'Not much afraid. What does he do? What does he look like?'

'I will tell you that as we march along.'

The Second One continued in his fond way :

'Nea-huni and all the rest of these gods and half-gods—there they live and toss us about like leaves in autumn, and laugh, and never cease playing dirty tricks on us. And here we live, we mortals, in grovelling misery. A tough old man like you : why cannot you play some tricks on them, for a change? Why cannot you laugh back?'

'Always the same silly babble,' replied the

other gravely. 'Be careful. Your malady makes you short-witted and apt to say ill-considered things. Remember your friend Thwartis, the ague-demon.'

'I am feeling unusually well today, let me tell you. And therefore: a blight on Thwartis! And another blight on the Great Father and all his children's children! Not a single one of them knows his business.'

The Sun, first-born of that same Great Father, mildest, most sensitive and conscientious of Gods, happened just then to be peering through the foliage. He overheard these words and turned away, in surprise and pain, his honest face; saving, not for the first time, the good name of all his immortal companions.

A momentary darkness fell upon the land.

NEA-HUNI was the last survivor of those stalwart and long-lived Satyrs who peopled the whole earth before the arrival of the human kind. They were called bull-faced only because they had horns. Their features were serenely beautiful.

These favoured ones were lovers of peace ; they were the earliest tillers of the soil, and the best ; they were masterly builders, they cultivated the art of music and weaving and the dance and medicine and a hundred others, they mapped out the heavens, giving names to every star both wanderer and fixed, they studied the earth and its stones and fruits ; and whatever mankind subsequently came to know of all these things was nothing but a few scattered fragments of their lore.

In the course of ages their wisdom grew to be such that the Great Father, fearful of losing his throne by some trick of theirs and jealous of his fame as all-knowing, laid upon them, in one of his fits of rage, a terrible curse : the curse of utter infecundity. Accordingly, as the centuries slipped along, these Satyrs died out one

by one, leaving no offspring to inherit their name, and their persons and works and learning faded into oblivion. While slowly perishing, however, they yet found time, to the Great Father's intense annoyance, to teach the Colocynthians, of that newly created race of beings, many fair and profitable arts and to help them in other ways ; and the grumpy but grateful folk still preserved some memory of this good deed.

Delighted as he may have been to see them go, the Father of the Gods, as usual, was not long in repenting of his wrath, for now the earth, his plaything, began to grow barren and to empty itself of all the life which used to afford him pleasant and wholesome diversion. He therefore took thought and out of the dung of Hapso, that divine but loathly fowl, kneaded a malodorous paste and therewith fashioned mankind, a new tribe of creatures, puny and hornless, a subservient brood from whom there was nothing to fear and in whom one could nevertheless take a certain interest ; a brood barely tinctured with such divinity as was that vulture's dung, and just intelligent enough to be laughed at. To save himself the trouble of inventing any fresh shapes, he created them in his own image. It was one of his many

achievements. About this time, too, he consolidated his power by filling the Celestial Halls with progeny of his own whom he could browbeat as he pleased, and driving out aliens and Old Doubtful Ones by violence or stratagem. Now he reigned supreme, though somewhat embittered of late by lack of earthly worshippers.

The venerable Nea-huni, child of Nea, had dwelt solitary these several hundred years, outliving all his friends of olden days ; outliving even Azdhubal, fighter of demons, his last and dearest companion. Men from those thinly peopled regions often came to him as to an oracle, or to profit by his rare knowledge of herbs. They came not with signs of flattery or adoration, which he disliked ; they brought him simple gifts of flowers, or nothing at all. His fame as seer and healer of diseases had spread so far, and mortals had learnt so much from him, none ever quitting his threshold save wiser or happier or healthier than when he arrived, that the Great Father, again suspicious, persuaded these abject earth-crawlers into a distrust of the Satyr's godly virtues, and even filled their empty minds with the belief that he, the placid vegetarian, was accustomed to devour his own guests. Nea-huni was aware of

these things, and of the curse laid long ago upon himself and all his kind. He bowed his wise head to the storm, soberly despising this insult to the glorious tribe of Satyrs. He knew that it is in the nature of the powerful to be envious.

So it came about that few visitors had approached him lately. They kept away, scared by the Great Father's inspiration ; among the last to consult him were the parents of that Second One, who brought their ailing child.

The gentle son of Nea was more lonesome then ever ; lonesome, but tranquil.

THAT First One being too fat and heavy for the horses of those days, he and Linus were obliged to travel on foot. They wandered down stream, with many halts by the way, and only at sunrise, after passing the bitumen ponds, did Nea-huni's abode come in sight. It was a landmark, a wave of rising ground, the only one of such a kind in that boundless plain ; a knoll whose natural height was nearly doubled by the towering trees that covered its surface. It took them the better part of the day to reach the foot of this green hillock.

Here, climbing upwards in the shade, they suddenly found themselves in strange surroundings. Everything was unfamiliar. The very plants seemed to be of a different race from those down below.

'Look!' said Linus, pointing earthward. They were marching up a path of hewn slabs of stone—monstrous blocks, the like of which was nowhere to be seen in the plain. Where had they come from? And how, he asked, had they been hammered into such smooth masses and so cunningly fitted together?

'Those Satyrs knew more than we do,' was all his companion could reply.

The paved track wound aloft, now gently and under trees, now rising in a broad stairway to some flat piece of ground planted with herbs and fruit-trees. It was on reaching one of these terraces that they first caught sight of old Nea-huni delving the earth, at no great distance from them, with a strangely formed implement. He looked up, and threw a garment of some rich scarlet material over his limbs; then came forward to greet them. Though he stooped slightly from age, his height was greater than that of any mortal; his bearing stately; and those words of welcome sounded so cordial that Linus, after another glance into his eyes—the trustful, shining eyes that had seen better days—forthwith lost all fear of him.

Nea-huni went on:

'And now come up with me. You look tired and hungry, both of you, and I have also worked enough for today.' Therewith he took each of them by the hand and led them along the few remaining stairs to his abode on the summit of the hill.

Never had Linus seen such a building, or conceived it possible that a mass of this

immense solidity could be upraised on earth. It was a one-storied structure, fashioned of huge fragments of some rose-tinted rock ; it looked eternal. A fountain gushed out at one side of the entrance.

'Rest on these couches awhile,' said Nea-huni, when they had passed through the portal. 'I am going to bring you some food,' he added ; and disappeared into the interior.

'I like him,' said Linus, as soon as the Satyr's back was turned.

'I thought you would. Trust me, he will not crunch up either of us.'

'Then my uncle was wrong ? '

'That poor weak thing ! He is more often wrong than right.'

After an incredibly short interval Nea-huni emerged again, bearing a tray with sundry warm dishes. While they refreshed themselves, the First One began to relate something of their history and to set forth the object of the visit.

'If that be so,' said their host to Linus, 'you had better eat heartily. You will have nothing more till tomorrow evening, though I shall place a pitcher of milk beside your couch in case you feel thirsty. Tell me as soon as you have had enough.'

The boy obeyed this injunction and enquired:

'Why, O Satyr, don't you eat something too?'

'Because I dine later in the evening, and alone.'

'Oh!' said Linus, as a dreadful thought flashed through his mind.

'My meal consists of plants in one shape or another,' explained Nea-huni, with a sad smile.

The First One was saying:

'All these cooked green things are new to me, and such cakes I never saw. How wonderfully everything tastes! You would be very kind, Nea-huni, to tell me a little about them before we go away. I am old, but I still like to learn.'

'Certainly I will. How old are you, O man?'

'Seventy or eighty years. I forget which.'

'At your age, young friend, I was beginning to walk upright. We Satyrs were not creatures of an hour. We had time before us; time in which each separate one could hive up and enjoy and dispense to others his own particular store of talents. Some were thinkers, some builders, some—like my dear friend Azdhubal—were fighters, and so forth! But our existence, long as it was, is now drawing to a close, and our feats of strength and learning will soon fade out of memory. It took you, I daresay, a

day or more to wander here from the bitumen fountains. My comrade and myself used to walk there and back in an hour.'

'I have eaten enough,' Linus suddenly remarked.

'Then come with me. You will be obliged to remain in the dark all the time.'

'No matter to Linus.'

The gentle Satyr returned alone and remarked :

'I should tell you that this deprivation of food and lying with the oracle in the dark is supposed to lighten the body of gross humours and to set free the imprisoned soul ; to render a being transparent to the eyes of a seer. What is all prophecy but a seeing-through ? We used to think, at least, that by breaking down his daylight defences of full stomach and stout heart we facilitated our task of reading a man's future. It may be so ; the custom is certainly not of yesterday. For the rest, my young friend, the prophetic art, like every other one, ought to be kept in constant repair ; it is like a garden which must be assiduously cultivated if it is to bear good fruit. Perhaps you are aware that I have not had much occasion of late to cultivate that garden ? '

'I know ! ' replied the First One. 'But my

confidence in your powers is infinite. They brought you an ailing child from our settlement many years ago. You said he should be thrown to the crocodiles.'

'The oracle has occasionally been inspired to recommend that course.'

'Well, he is still alive, and sicklier and stupider than ever. Only think, Nea-huni, that I, who know nothing at all, am supposed to be the cleverest of all our village, which is full of dotards and infirm folk.'

The Satyr observed :

'I am not surprised. It is one of the tricks of the Great Father to foster weaklings from whom he has nothing to fear. In my day it was not thought right to keep such children alive. We retained none save those that promised well. Now as to the boy you have brought here today—I begin to feel a little doubtful about his origin. He is not altogether of mortal stock.'

'Indeed ! You amaze me, Nea-huni. We all knew his father and mother.'

'My experiences as oracle have convinced me that men are apt to be misinformed about these family affairs.'

So saying, the Satyr shook his head gravely, as though the subject were not much to his liking.

FOR some reason which he could not explain —the result maybe of that excellent dinner— the First One slept long into next morning. He rose at last, and, going out of doors, washed himself at the fountain ; then glanced overhead at the Sun who was looking down from a cloudless sky.

'Midday,' he thought. 'Now where could the amiable Satyr be?' Linus, he knew, was still imprisoned in the dark sanctuary. He took to pacing about that upper level beside the walls of Nea-huni's massive, rosy dwelling ; it was shaded in places by an ingenious contrivance of plaited woodwork, over which clambered and clustered some unknown plant with fresh green leaves. Through an occasional break in those groups of noble trees he surveyed the four or five terraces below him and, further on, the boundless plain all drenched in sunshine ; he caught a glimpse, here and there, of that sluggish river wending—whither? No one knew.

Suddenly he espied the Satyr down there, near the same spot where he had been on the

previous evening and engaged, as then, in delving the ground. Another patch had been cleared of its wild plants and newly turned over; the black earth lay in small ridges at the feet of Nea-huni who leaned sometimes on his implement, as though weary, and then continued at the task, stroke after stroke, with an air of grim determination. Often he paused for longer periods, and looked regretfully at a large tract before him yet to be tilled. His scarlet vestment dangled from the limb of a neighbouring tree. The First One, after watching these proceedings for some time, decided not to disturb them.

Two or three hours afterwards he saw Nea-huni moving laboriously up hill, wrapped in his bright garment. They greeted one another and the Satyr proceeded indoors to fetch some refreshment, which he brought out once more in a remarkably short space of time, and disposed about a table in the shade of those climbing plants. During this meal he seemed to be more distracted and remote than before ; he said not a word about Linus, and the First One, observing his preoccupied air, thought better not to question him either about this matter or about the generations of the gods or the origin of mankind or any of the other

thousand things which he would have liked to learn. He only ventured to remark :

' How quickly you brought that food, O Nea-huni ! You are here and there and here again.'

' We were taught to be nimble as youngsters. There was once a poor mortal,' he went on, ' who came to me with some complaint, and I cured him. Such was his grateful heart that he refused to go home again ; he vowed he would stay here and do all my work for the rest of his life. And such was my own kind heart that I could not bear to drive him out. He was the first of his race who ever sojourned with me ; and he shall be the last. I grew almost ill from vexation at his slowness and awkwardness. Never, O man, have I been so near to shedding blood as during the visit of that mortal ! Fortunately he died of his own accord, having learnt nothing whatever, after a short stay of fifty years or thereabouts.'

' It will indeed take us wretched folk much time and labour before we can concoct food like this.'

' Or drink like this,' replied Nea-huni, opening a gourd full of some unknown liquid, of which he filled two goblets. ' Try a cup ! It is made of the fruit of the plant growing above us, and used to be one of our chief delights in olden

days, when we still frolicked and sang. How merry we used to be ! Those dances at harvest time, the building festivals, our joyous rambles through forests or over mountain-tops—who thinks of them now ? . . . Is its taste to your liking ? '

' Wonderful ! ' cried the First One. ' Most wonderful ! It flits about my veins like laughing fire. I think I should try another draught, while you expound its virtues.'

The Satyr said :

' Nothing can come of a race like yours, O man, which nourishes itself on milk and water. Your frame absorbs those peevish elements, and grows into milk and water itself. Some few of our tribe, I remember, persisted in drinking milk. They were among the weakest and least enlightened ones. They perished long before the others. Without this liquid you will acquire neither our wisdom nor our cheerful spirits ; you will never learn to despise the contemptible tricks of the gods, or even to understand them.'

' I believe you,' exclaimed the other. ' I feel your words are true. I could teach the Great Father at this moment some wisdom and some tricks which he has not yet found time to acquire. Tell me, how shall this drink be

made? I am old, but never too old to learn.'

Nea-huni replied meditatively:

'Linus, I think, will one day be able to teach you that, and other new things as well . . . Why not wander awhile about these plantations?' he added. 'It is pleasant to see how flowers and trees have thriven since last one saw them.'

'Another cup before we go! Just one. I am old, O Satyr, but never too old for such nourishment. Ah, now the gourd is empty.'

'You have exceeded the measure of your kind, my young friend. Your head will swim.'

'Swimming already, and most delightfully,' replied the other, as they rose to depart.

They strolled in gentle ups and downs about the terraces. The First One noticed that many of them wore a half-abandoned look; several patches of ground remained bare, and gay flowers were struggling for life amid a wilderness of unsightly weeds. Nea-huni glanced mournfully at these things as he walked along, stooping down now and then to bind up a straggler or uproot some noxious growth.

'Formerly,' he said, 'my muscles were mighty. I could labour through the whole hot hours,

and these plantations were different from what they are at present—how different! Even now I sometimes delve a little in the afternoons, but not often. This entire hillside, O man, is the work of my own hands, and used to be in most perfect repair. Look at it now! And every corner of the plain down there was peopled and tilled by others of my kind. Look at it now! We were passionate gardeners, nearly all of us; we collected plants for beauty, and plants for use, from the most distant regions of the world. Those glorious blossoms that trail up the trees yonder and writhe about their branches, scattering here and there in a shower of purple clusters—you see them? I carried the young plant on my own back, together with many others, out of the far-away land of the Colocynthians.'

'Colocynthians?'

'A certain tribe of mortals, whom we Satyrs helped in several ways. Old times, old times . . . And now let us rest a little on the shady bank over there. I am apt to grow weary at this hour of the day. Perhaps you would also like to repose your limbs?'

'Happy thought!' said the First One. 'I confess I feel a little different to what I felt before; a little sleepy.'

They stretched themselves out, and Nea-huni proceeded :

' We are crumbling to earth, I and my house and gardens. In our day, O man, every flower and every stone had its name, and its peculiar properties were known to all of us. What do you poor people know of them, or of the thousand other things that even our little ones understood ? You have indeed been shrivelled to ashes by cruel and witless gods ! And now the last of the Satyrs is about to depart. Soon enough, I daresay, the Wind will blow over this hill, forgetful of what he once saw here.'

' The Wind—yes. He often blows. I wish he would send a few of his cool breaths just now over this cheek of mine, which seems to be far warmer than needful. Why am I all in a tangle, O Satyr ? And I wish . . .'

Nea-huni continued, speaking to himself :

' He is going to sleep. Of such stuff are these mortals made. One drop of enlightenment suffices to daze their thin senses . . . On this selfsame bank we often reclined, we two, conversing of old days while the Sun went down. Never shall I forget Azdhubal, the fighter of demons, the comrade of my soul ! They died out, all the others, one by one ; we were the last survivors of our blissful race.

Here, on this hilltop, we lived together those long lonely years. And here we looked around us, and thought of dead comrades, and saw hideous desolation creeping over things that were once so fair. Grief at our misfortunes drove him at the end into a kind of heartache and soft craziness ; he sighed out his gentle breath in my arms, and I laid him to rest under his own favourite pine-tree. O Azdhubal, I am ever alone, and thinking ever of you, my friend, and ever yearning for your dear companionship ! Would I might see your face again, and listen to that loving talk which struck so sweetly on my ears and lingered there, like moonbeams on a lake ! '

THE First One was in a heavy doze, nor did he wake up till much later when a touch from the Satyr roused him, and he heard the words :

' You have slept long while my own thoughts were flitting far, far away. I must now discover what more is to be learnt from Linus, and then let him out. He will be hungry.'

After a good lapse of time they emerged from the sanctuary, Nea-huni and Linus ; the former wearing a strangely gleeful air, the latter pale with hunger and troubled in mien from his long confinement in the dark. His eyes roved shyly from place to place, as though he had been disturbed in pleasant dreamings.

' Eat, child,' said the Satyr who had prepared a meal with more than his usual alacrity. ' Eat all you can, and perhaps a little more. And you, O fat one, try to do the same.'

The First One observed :

' Each of your dishes, Nea-huni, is more succulent than the last. I begin to understand why that fellow-creature of mine, whom you cured of some distemper, refused to go home

again. Was he not the wisest of our miserable race? I think he was, and I feel disposed to follow his example.'

'To look at your rotundity,' replied the other, 'one should say you lacked nothing at home.'

'My women are among the best in our settlement, and yet what lazy ones! O Satyr, the beatings they require!'

Linus, having satisfied his hunger, felt revived and forthwith stepped in where the First One had feared to tread. He turned to Nea-huni:

'You told me many things in the sanctuary. But I forgot to ask you this. Did you ever, with your own eyes, see an Immortal?'

'Not a few of them. They consult me, like your own race used to do, for all their little troubles. One of the last who came to me was he of the Earth, and that was only a short time ago. Would you like to learn about him? I was resting here all alone, and thinking rather sadly of an old friend of mine called Azdhubal, and how this plain at our feet used to be teeming with happy life, when I heard a sudden rustle in the air, as of a whirlwind, and saw the crowns of the trees bending sideways more violently than I had ever thought it possible for them to bend. They are going to crack, I

said to myself; and in that same instant they straightened out again, and then——'

'And then—— ?'

'And then, my child, the place, the very place where you are now sitting, within reach of my hand, was no longer empty. A Figure was there, not of my horned kind but of yours, wreathed in flickering flames and exhaling a wonderful perfume; the Figure of a sturdy old mortal. There was a club in his hand——'

'Ah! I have seen him.'

Nea-huni seemed to be not much surprised at these words. He went on:

'You may have done so. He smiled at my amazement and said in winning tones: "I have come for your advice, old bull-face. You know me?" I replied: "Certainly I do. You are one of the thousand sons of that poisonous usurper up there." He said: "Don't speak disrespectfully of my wonderful Parent, or I shall scorch you to a cinder and blow this hovel of yours into the clouds with a little sneeze. You know Aroudi? He annoys me."'

'Aroudi?' interrupted the First One. 'I never heard of Aroudi, although I am the cleverest of all our village.'

The Satyr replied:

'It is not surprising. You cannot be ex-

pected to know the names of all that violent and lawless scum. Then I said to the Earth-god : " No doubt Aroudi annoys you. He is the wild one, the enemy of crops and ordered ways ; he sows thistles overnight and sends the caterpillars and dries up the fountains or makes them ruin the land in a deluge ; he does all he can to displease you. Another of your pretty brood ! And it is one of the tricks of that delightful father of yours to set you and Aroudi, and all his other children, one against the other, in order that he may keep full control of them for ever and ever." He answered : " Try to be polite, Monster ! I said nothing uncivil to you and have never harmed you. Now : how shall I rid myself of this demon ? " Then I asked : " What reward will you give me, if I help you to catch him ? " And then——'

' And then——'

' Then he laughed most melodiously——'

' I have heard that laugh,' said Linus.

' I daresay you have ! He laughed and said : " You have pretensions, O Satyr. Remember that they who can blight are not in the habit of rewarding. But since you suffer more than all the others of your perished race, and since I am not without streaks of kindliness, and since I heard you lamenting a moment ago the loss of

some old friend called Azdhubal and the present wretchedness of all this land, I will give you the consolation, before you die, of meeting him once more and of seeing the plain as prosperous as ever it was in those old days." I replied : " Considering your parentage, that was surprisingly well spoken." And I told him how he should mix a drowsy bowl of bruised and unripe poppy-heads, and add sweet honey and grape juice and other things, and set it near the spot where the giant-fiend was wont to pass. " If he comes that way," I said, " he will smell it. If he smells it, he will drink it. If he drinks it, he will begin to stagger about and dance, or even fall asleep, and then——" '

' And then ? ' asked Linus. ' What more ? '

' What more ? You may well ask what more. I can say nothing beyond this, that while I yet spoke, the place where you are sitting was empty again. He had learnt what he came to learn ; he had learnt how to catch Aroudi ; he was gone ! Only his fragrance still hung about the air. I looked at the trees, but they were motionless ; he must have passed by some other way. Nor did I know till just now whether he ever outwitted that wild one—not till just now. To judge by the neglected appearance of the country, I argued, it seemed

unlikely, and if he did, he certainly never came to thank me ; gratitude is not to be expected of the gods ! I said to myself : he is forgetful, dreadfully forgetful, like all the rest of them. And I abandoned hope of seeing a change in the desolation down there, or of meeting my friend again. But now——'

'But now ? ' asked Linus.

The Satyr hesitated awhile. Then he said :

'But now, O Linus, it is time for you to rest. You can sleep on that couch over there. I have told you something about the gods. Soon enough, believe me, you will hear a good deal more from their own lips. You have had a wearisome day by yourself in the dark, and no repose last night. And your journey home is going to be long.'

'Nea-huni is right,' said the First One, as Linus still lingered. 'Go to sleep, my child, and may your dreams be blithe as your face.'

He left them, rather reluctantly

'But now ? ' enquired the First One.

'But now,' said the Satyr, while his eyes kindled with pleasure, 'the Earth-god is about to keep his promise. Aroudi has been captured, and Linus is to annul his desolation and be restorer of ordered ways. Nor shall I fail to meet my dear Azdhubal again. Hear the

oracle's words, O man. There are horrors in store for that boy, and endless glory. His father is of immortal race. That is all I shall tell you.'

They farewelled at sunrise, after giving many thanks to the courteous Nea-huni, who seemed not a little wistful at the departure of his guests.

And now the travellers began to move away. As they reached the first flight of steps overhung by shady trees, they glanced back once more at their host. There he stood, the venerable Nea-huni, erect on his threshold in the sunshine, with that flaming robe about him and both arms raised skyward in formal salutation.

IN Eskion, that dusky old place, something was amiss ; not for the first time. During the last eight or ten days a sullen, stifling heat had brooded over the region. None remembered such fiery and breathless weather, least of all at this early season of the year. The citizens tottered sleepily about the lanes of the town, and, in the rich fields beyond, those emerald crops had begun to wilt and hang their heads—there would be a famine, they declared, unless relief came soon. The blue sea, which should have brought freshness and moisture, lay stagnant under its swart lava cliffs, in a glassy death.

That this state of affairs derived from Derco, that the Great Maiden-Goddess was displeased or troubled in mind, became manifest when the myriad ashen-tinted Duri-fish in their tank under the temple-trees, who always flocked so gaily to take food at the hands of their attendant, were observed to be declining all nourishment. Numbers of the sacred creatures floated about lifeless, with upturned livid bellies. The thing had occurred before, and was regarded

as an evil portent. Propitiatory sacrifices went on without ceasing. Black puppy-dogs, Derco's favourite offering, were slaughtered by sevens and fourteens, and their blood flowed in rivulets over the stone altars ; the howl of these victims mingled with clashing sankums and the lamentations of distracted worshippers. For Derco was a capricious, vindictive and sanguinary deity, whose rage might be appeased, with sufficient blood, from one moment to the next.

The townsmen, meanwhile, were complaining sadly :

'What new visitation is this, O Maiden Derco ? Often have you sent us pestilences, and storms to wreck our vessels, and frog-showers, and legions of mice that ate up our grain ; not long ago you flooded us with a cloud-burst which cracked the very houses ; are we now to be seared and scorched alive ? Wherein have we failed ? Tell us, Derco ! What more shall be done to please you ? Tell us, Derco ! Accept our sacrifices and remove this infliction. Are you blind to our suffering ? Are you deaf to our prayers ? '

The greatest heat seemed to radiate from the temple-precincts and their grove of swarthy thymul trees. This Holy Place, then a rude,

square building of timber bedaubed within and without in barbaric patterns, all glistening, of sea-monsters black and vermilion, could hardly be entered ; it was full of a suffocating steam. Emaciated priests, all drenched in perspiration, spent their wasted forces in chanting hymns and praying for relief, which never came. The sultriness grew worse. Many citizens had perished out of doors within the last few days. They were seen to stagger awhile, as though dazed ; then, raising one hand to their faces, they fell suddenly earthward with a cry, and never rose again. There they lay, rotting in the heat.

Now the people, not for the first time, began to clamour more loudly :

' Enough of misery, which passes endurance. We are always in the wrong, it seems. Nothing will satisfy this Maiden of ours—nothing ! And whose the fault if not our own, for honouring so moody a Protectress ? Let us have done with her ! Let us choose a grave and reasonable man-god, not subject to everlasting virginal humours. Why not pull down this old temple of hers, and raise a nobler edifice to some deity with better ears ? Or why not burn it ? Why not burn it ? Oh, to see it blazing ! '

So they spoke, and so they were about to act when that pale and pious young priest, whose duty it was to guard the inner shrine, observed that the ruddy flame hovering there, which denoted to mortal eyes the presence of the Goddess, had slipped off its golden brasier and was gone.

'Wonderful are the ways of Immortals!' he cried. 'She has departed once again, to join her deathless Companions for a while. There, as always, she will find consolation for her troubles whatever they may be. And then perhaps our torment will end.'

He stepped out of the torrid sanctuary to announce the news.

'Now we shall see,' said the exasperated townsmen. 'Let her only remove the curse! Then all will be well. Let her act as befits the Protectress of a great city. Else down with that temple and away with Derco!'

AT the other end of the world, meanwhile, a joyous spring descended upon the plain. It might have come overnight, so suddenly was it there. Flowers of every hue carpeted the ground, and the fresh shoots of grass were reaching to the horses' knees. Swallows glided over the sunny surface of that stream which had already begun to rise and to grow slightly turbid.

Linus, on returning after his visit to the Satyr Nea-huni, saw these things with rapture. He lay naked in a godlike content under that gigantic white poplar, and watched his wintry sheepskin drifting away, like last year's one, and looked across the water where, in the far distance, those jagged white teeth could sometimes be seen half-way up the sky. They were not visible today ; their place was veiled in mists. Silvery doves, unnumbered multitudes of them, were speeding up stream to their nesting places among the crags that overhung a certain blue lake in the North, of which he knew nothing. He wondered dreamily why they always flew, year after year, in the same direction.

Presently he rose and took to his old pastime of driving stakes in the sand at the water's edge, to mark the slow rise of the flood. He had spent long hours at this game last spring. Now his heart was no more in the childish sport ; he was feeling older, different ; moreover, the Sun rode high and gave out too much heat. He returned to the poplar's shade and stretched himself out in sheer joy of life on that well-known bank of tender mint which, crushed under the weight of his body, sent an arrowy savour into the air.

His thoughts turned to Ayra whom he would see later in the day. The remembrance of her caused a delicious yearning to invade his senses. It grew more violent ; with the precocity of all god-children, he deliberately set to indulging his voluptuous imagination. ' This time, yes,' he decided, while calling to mind their last encounter in the cool thicket and what things had then befallen, and how awkwardly he had behaved and spoken. And now his eyes began to follow, in love-sick fancy, the curves of her slender body, resting with complacence on this or that part of it ; he pictured her there, on the ground, yielding in his arms ; he listened, in a luxury of anticipation, to her vain implorings for delay . . . yes, thus would he act——

Something, out there in the water, flashed like a ray of sunlight into his vision. It was that portent of which he had once spoken to Ayra's father, that eyed and spangled monster of a fish, all ablaze in celestial hues. A spiky fin of azure throbbed in air ; it vanished. The creature had dived amid a mighty swirl of waters, and on the riverbank near him was Ayra, Ayra naked, Ayra glorified, transfigured, whiter and ampler of limb . . . could it be her true self? Had his thoughts conjured her out of those grey-green eddies ? She stood still for a while as if hesitating, then moved graciously upwards and lay down beside him on the odorous turf. Her look was now averted ; she seemed to have grown timorous and embarrassed. Not a word passed between them—nothing but loving wonderment.

Presently her hand sought his ; she drew it gently towards her face and, bending the wrist, implanted a kiss on that spot. At the divine contact, a thrill ran through the boy's frame—the thrill of a moment, and his eyelids closed. Even now there was silence. A more than earthly shyness had overcome the unearthly visitor. At last she began, in faint and pleading tones, almost incoherently :

' Those men are trying to ease my torments

with noisy music ; with litanies and with sacrifice. Little they know of torments, which you alone can ease . . . The anguish of it ! I suffered in my temple, till suffering was no longer to be borne . . . Fair mortal, I have come to you from the other end of this great earth. Who would not do the same ? The memory of you is burnt into me, and oh ! wherever my glance may wander, there it encounters nothing but your sweet image . . .'

Linus heard the words, but his voice refused to come. In vain did he try to find utterance. Nor dared he open his eyes. He was numbed with fearful joy and fearful dread. All that love-courage of a moment ago had melted clean away.

Now she gazed at him lying there in stark bewilderment, and straightway her humid mouth grew restless. It travelled upwards along his arm and played lingeringly about the neck and breast ; then overran that smooth body, softly at first, like the quivering touch of a butterfly's wing, soon in a wayward and scalding torrent that drove a succession of rapid tremors through his flesh. Her left hand gathered his head to her bosom and toyed with passion among the clustering curls ; the other roved ardently hither and thither. She whispered in his ear :

'Dear child, I have unravelled the lore of delight where mortals may never hope to tread. I have explored its sweetest, innermost recesses. And will you not learn from me? . . . Only speak! Let me listen to the voice which I have come so far to hear. Open your eyes, my love, and let me lose myself in their wonderland. Oh, quench my flame! . . . Say, are you compassionless?'

'No.' The word was breathed rather than spoken.

'Content me now, and be my mate.'

Then fountains of bliss were unsealed, and the Sun, who had been gazing down absent-mindedly through the tender leafage of spring, grew abashed and was glad to discover a fleecy wander-cloud behind which to hide his head.

Ages fled by, or seemed to flee, while the youth tasted what it is to recline in immortal arms, where momentary oblivion is forthwith succeeded by redoubled desire. He marvelled at being able to survive a tingling trance that had no end; a trance that came and went, and waxed and waned, and never passed away. An apt pupil was Linus, and not for nothing his father's son. Soon his embraces grew bold and domineering; they atoned in vigour for what they still lacked in variety; and more

than atoned. Nor was their object slow in marking the change. All that late forwardness forsook her ; she felt deliciously fragile and submissive, taking joy as never before, while her divinity was bent and broken this way and that, and crushed and moulded to his will.

'What can it be ?' she gasped, during one of those lulls when life seemed to ebb away in a warm spasm of forgetfulness. 'What can it mean ? There is something in this tireless child of earth which is strange to me, for never, in my age-long experience of mortality, have I been so mercilessly mastered. The transport of it !' she cried aloud, as the sweet agony recommenced. 'I perish, I can bear no more ! Would you kill your love ? Ah, pause and let me breathe again. Have pity ! Enough, enough '—a word she had not yet uttered on such occasions . . .

WHEN Linus woke from that refreshing slumber he found himself alone, and only to those who have never lain in the arms of a goddess will it seem strange that, far from being satiated with love, his thoughts turned straightway to Ayra.

'This time, yes!' he cried, springing to his feet.

They were there, both she and her father, on the sandy beach; they welcomed him with joy, then swiftly glanced at one another. To their eyes, the youth had never worn such a proud and dazzling air. He was changed indeed; an afterglow of those divine caresses still hung about him. He drew apart in composure and watched as they proceeded with that work which Ayra had often tried to teach him and for which he professed no interest or aptitude —the work of sorting the fish.

As always at this season, a huge catch had been made; villagers would soon come down to bargain for it, each carrying away his own share. Finned creatures of every kind and size were lying about, none more fearsome than

those pallid slime-loving monsters with the face of an unhappy man, that groaned aloud as they were drawn on shore and, slow to die, were even yet gasping and writhing about the hot earth. Fish-hawks circled overhead with wild cries, and pounced briskly from time to time upon some choice morsel. Linus took pleasure in the quiet scene ; the nets hung up to dry, the sunlit river flowing at his feet, that shady thicket within a stone's throw : how cool it would be, in a short while, under its trees ! And what other joys should he not discover there !

He waited in patience till all was over ; he was serenely happy. Then, while Ayra went to wash her arms at the water's edge, he drew near to her father and observed with assurance :

' Up till a few days ago I was a dreamy child. I talked and acted heedlessly. Now I know what I want.'

' What do you want, young one ? '

' I want to take Ayra yonder, into the shade.'

' Why, take her, my son.'

As they were moving towards the spot, he said to the girl :

' You are grown pale, Ayra. I know why. I know everything. And you must know everything too. I shall tell you today about the Satyr Nea-huni and his wonderful house,

and what happened there. Why not go to our favourite nook ? You remember that last fight of ours ? We begin a new one at once.'

' Another day.'

' No, now. Look at me, Ayra. What do you see ? Look, I say ; look all over ! '

She did so, shuddering deliciously, and said :

' So be it. But I fear I shall lose the battle this time. O Linus, be gentle with your Ayra . . .'

Arrived under the trees, they began a long friendly conversation, towards the end of which Linus took the opportunity to teach her some smattering of the lore he had learnt, an hour or so ago, from the great Fish-goddess of Eskion. Then he remarked, in his divinely abrupt fashion :

' I shall now ask my uncle, that old simpleton, to make some of his fat, lazy women carry all my belongings up here, while I myself drive the horses and sheep. Still much to be done, you see. Expect me at sundown. And—Ayra ! There is to be more fighting tonight.'

' I thought so. And I shall be beaten again. Shall I ? '

' Trust Linus for that.'

He departed hastily inland towards the village. At the same time Ayra, issuing alone

from that thicket, encountered a keen glance from her father's eyes. He observed :

'So far as I can judge, that boy of yours has found his wits at last.'

'What did I say, father ? '

THE Fish-goddess, radiant and assuaged, had meanwhile plunged into the swollen river and flashed to Eskion down stream and through the grey paths of Ocean, washing away, in their lustral waters, the stains of human kind and all remembrance of her splendid frolic. Nor had she forgotten, ere departing, lightly to touch her young lover's brow ; it was her playful manner with those children of earth to whom she took a fancy.

' Now he dies, and all is well,' she mused, thinking to deal, as usual, with one of those mortal striplings whom she loved, and whose seed, cast on such heavenly soil, can bear no fruit. She knew nothing of certain godlike particles in the nature of Linus. They resisted the spell ; he lived on, and Derco was soon to be made aware, in her own divine person, of another dreadful complication.

Ignorant of what the future held in store, she glided into her beloved sanctuary where that pale and pious young priest, who guarded the inner shrine, was amazed to perceive a red flamelet once more hovering over the brasier

which it had forsaken only a few hours earlier. He could not believe his eyes. Was it possible ?

' Back already,' he muttered. ' Wonderful ! This was indeed a brief visit to the Celestial Halls. Have her companion deities been able to console our Maiden in that short time ? '

At the same instant he felt a cool breath of wind about his face, and heard the glad sound of rain pattering merrily upon the wooden roof overhead.

' They have,' he cried, ' they have ! The curse is lifted and Eskion saved from torrid destruction. One single word from the Great Mother, no doubt, has appeased her wrath, when our poor human supplications and offerings were all of no avail. Wonderful are the ways of Immortals ! '

THE curse was lifted.

Soft rains continued to fall, interspersed with gleams of sunlight ; the crops revived and gave promise of such a harvest as had never been known. It was one of many signs of prosperity. Never, for instance, was there less sickness at Eskion ; numbers of those who were expecting death from one cause or another recovered miraculously, and began to take new interest in their affairs. Trade and shipping, too, thrived in a marvellous manner ; not a vessel was lost on that rockbound coast. More than this, there frequently arrived strange folk by sea, bringing with them the rarest merchandise which they bartered away, as it seemed, for nothing. In a short space of time the welfare of the town had increased a hundred fold. Poor men grew rich, and every one was smiling.

Meanwhile, as if to remove all doubts, occurred that miracle of the Duri-fish. The sacred creatures not only came to themselves again ; they were bringing forth day by day a new brood of graceful shape, a sun-tinted generation that flashed with lightning-like

movements about the water. Soon only a few of the dusky ones were left. The priests, observing this prodigy, took to consulting their records. It was then discovered that only thrice in the age-long history of the town had a similar thing happened, and each time, as then, it was accompanied by an unexpected national revival. The inference became clear : Derco, the Maiden Goddess, was uncommonly well pleased with her worshippers, or with herself.

Babramolok . . .

Who, in those days, had not heard of Babramolok ?

Who had not seen that father of seventy sons —fortunate number !—stalking gravely through the streets, bare-headed, with long black beard that tapered to a needle-point half-way down his belly, and swathed in a sombre woollen cloak held together by a girdle of golden disks ? Who had not envied him ?

Now Babramolok, a man of few words and much money, was not only an architect, a builder of whatever had to be built, and the most famous of all. He was deeply versed in the mysteries of the Goddess. Though not a priest himself, he had done more than any of them to establish and consolidate her cult at Eskion. He spent all his wealth on the city's

Protectress. He was her devoted champion in good and bad times.

Babramolok, then, conceived a project which was joyfully acclaimed. What he impressed upon them, with unwonted profusion of phrases, was that whereas the people a short while ago had been on the point of burning Derco's temple, that whereas the Goddess had not only forgiven this insult but overwhelmed them with benefits to be neither weighed nor counted, it would be meet and proper, it would be honouring both the Maiden Protectress and themselves, to erect a new sanctuary, a sanctuary of solid stone, in the place of that old wooden one which had now served its purpose and could no longer be held worthy of the Divine Occupant. Relying on their adherence to this plan, he had already prepared certain designs for a lordly temple to be built at his own expense, and even purchased with his own money a site which he deemed appropriate, namely, a stretch of rocky plain to the North of the town, in an elevated position, directly overlooking the sea. What was their opinion?

There was not one dissentient voice to this proposal. The architect's popularity knew no bounds.

The building was begun forthwith and proceeded rapidly. Its huge foundations had almost been completed when, some months later, the pale young priest, whose duty it was to guard the inner shrine of that soon-to-be-abandoned black-and-vermilion structure, observed that the ruddy flame hovering there, which denoted to mortal eyes the presence of the Goddess, had once more slipped off its golden brasier and was gone.

'Wonderful, wonderful!' he thought. 'She has departed yet again. What can be the matter now?'

They were soon to know all of them. Miseries, miseries sudden and multiple and past endurance, fell upon Eskion. And soon enough the reason was made clear. A certain of the priests, and then another, recognized the signs and guessed Derco's secret. The Maiden Protectress was with child. The unthinkable had occurred! Without a doubt, the citizens would now carry out that old threat of driving her away and burning her temple.

As for her champion Babramolok, who had raised their hopes with that fond project of his —the wretch, as they called the wonderful man, was nowhere to be found. Shocked to the marrow at this turn of events, yet never for

a moment wavering in his devotion to the Protectress, he had chartered a vessel and scuttled away by sea, with all his gold, to the distant shores of the Biluthians. And there he remained in exile, devising a scheme which, sooner or later, was to re-instate Derco at Eskion in greater splendour than ever before.

THE Fish-goddess meanwhile slunk out of her divine precincts like some frightened mortal and wandered many days about the bleak earth, looking for consolation and finding none. At last she entered the Celestial Halls, determined to brave the mockery of her immortal companions and to seek the Great Father's advice.

On approaching those Gardens of Bliss, she observed Menetha seated among the deathless flowers beside the young Moon. They seemed to be engaged in some friendly discourse. The Moon was the first to catch sight of Derco, and at once eclipsed himself. It was only after this that Menetha, glancing up, saw her sister near at hand. She began, with a smile :

' It is ever so long since we met. How goes it, my dear ? '

' Ah, sister . . . But let me hear about yourself, to begin with ; and about the Moon. Are they still teasing you two ? '

' How kind of you to enquire ! No, they have given up teasing us and are looking about, I should say, for some new source of laughter.'

'They will soon find it,' said Derco sadly. 'And tell me: what of his weaknesses?'

The young Moon, and he alone of Immortals, was supposed to be sterile, and subject to convulsions.

'I have almost cured him of those tiresome fits,' replied Menetha. 'And I am not without hopes,' she added coyly, 'of healing his other infirmity as well. The gentle Moon—little they know of his true nature! They will soon discover whether he lacks what they possess. He is only shy; nothing else. Dear sister, I am happier than I ever yet was. I have almost forgotten to be wise.'

'That would never do, Menetha. You are the only one of us who always keeps her head. And now look at poor impulsive me. Yes; you may well be surprised. I took him for an ordinary mortal stranger; he was only a little prettier and lustier than most of them. Such a handsome boy! And I was so polite to him, so charming!'

'I am sure you were.'

'You see his work? You can feel the beat of its heart, if you place your hand on this spot. What 's to be done?'

'I see,' said the Goddess of Wisdom. 'That comes of being polite with strangers. For the

rest, you are not the first goddess to get into this kind of scrape. How that Clatterer would laugh, if he were here! Fortunately he is away just now, jeering at his prisoner Aroudi in some black mountain; that is his latest amusement. But he may return at any moment. What will your priests be saying? Don't they take you for a maiden?'

Tears started to the eyes of the Fish-goddess as she replied:

'They did; and till now I had no difficulty in keeping up appearances. I know too well what they are saying. They are saying: "Away with this horror!" Oh, help me, Menetha dear; put-me-to-rights. Do you think they would burn my temple? If they do, I am the unhappiest goddess that ever breathed. Why was I not born a mortal? They can at least kill themselves.'

There was a pause. At last Menetha observed:

'Things sometimes look worse than they are. Why not consult the old Satyr, that bull-faced Nea-huni? They say he is a splendid physician, and if you make it worth his while, he may do what you want. Then none of us need know anything. But, judging by appearances, you will have to be quick about it.'

'Dear, I have been there already. And oh, Menetha, you should see the horrible creature. All hairs and horns! He wore a ridiculous red cloak to cover his shaggy hide, and when I announced myself, asking for his advice, he only scowled and said he had a prejudice against female patients; they gave so much trouble and never told the truth. I promised him immortal life if he would assist me to expel this encumbrance. Can you guess what he said? He said immortality was the last thing he desired, seeing that it might bring him into contact with our poisonous society up here. Those were his words.'

'Satyrs will be Satyrs,' remarked Menetha. 'And you left him?'

'Indeed, no. I humbled myself still further. I implored him to do at least all he could, and swore by the sacred life of Hapso that he should come to no harm. Then he suddenly grunted: "How long has this trouble been going on?" When I told him, he began a most searching and conscientious examination. I thought: The dear old bull-face, he is going to help me after all! Can you guess what he said when it was over? Can you guess? He said in a horribly sententious fashion: "A girl, if I am not mistaken. And I can promise an easy

delivery. As to doing what you wish—it is out of the question No! It would be against my principles, fair Goddess! Life is throbbing within you, and we healers are not there to destroy life. Much as I like to oblige Immortals, I never oblige them in cases of this kind. Bear the inevitable discomfort, and try to be more prudent in future." Those were his words, and I think he was inwardly delighted at my misfortune; you know how he detests our whole divine race. But for my oath, I should have taken on some monster-shape and torn the hairy abomination to fragments, cloak and horns and all. What annoyed me was not so much his words, as the slimy and insufferable way he said them.'

'I can hear him. The rude old thing.'

'Ah! And he also predicted a marvellous future for this burden of mine. There he is wrong. I shall certainly kill it. Meanwhile I am in despair. Say, is it right that I should be driven from Eskion and from my darling Duri-fish and thymul trees and my black-and-vermilion sanctuary for a tiny slip like this, while all the rest of you have your shrines and the sweet adoration of worshippers? And they had just begun to build me such a lovely new one, all of stone. Oh, why need anybody

be a virgin? Why did I ever set eyes on the pretty little wretch?'

'I think I can answer that last question,' said the Goddess of Wisdom. 'You set eyes on him because you happened to be looking in his direction.'

'How wonderfully you explain everything! Would the Great Father help me?'

Menetha pondered awhile.

'Nowadays,' she replied, 'he seldom intervenes if he can avoid it; he hates being disturbed. He may not answer you at all. Or perhaps he will say "Call up the Sun"—as if the dear simple Sun were of the slightest use to anybody save for shining and warming! That is our Parent's latest method of solving problems, and, between ourselves, rather an unsatisfactory one. Sulky, you know, about those decayed temples of his. How gay we used to be: you remember? What an astonishing Papa he was! Something new every moment! But of late he never makes us laugh and never invents anything fresh; he has forgotten all his tricks and surprises. Sulky! No harm in approaching him, of course. He is alone at present. The others are still banqueting.'

'Come with me, Menetha, and explain my

case to him. You are Goddess of Wisdom and one of his favourite children ; I feel sure you can persuade him to help. He never has a kind word for me—I don't know why. Do your best, dear Sister ! '

THEY drew near the luminous region where, wrapped in a roseate haze, the Great Father of the Gods reclined, allowing the barest outlines of his divine lineaments to appear, and Menetha set forth with more than her customary eloquence the sad predicament of her sister, and ended by praying him to devise some expedient for her relief.

No answer was vouchsafed.

'I feared so,' said Menetha.

At this moment the Great Mother appeared on the scene. She looked considerably flurried.

'My dears,' she began, after they had greeted one another, 'I can bear it no longer. The din at those banquets is not to be believed. It has positively driven me away. Some of the half-gods, especially—will they never learn how to behave in our company? But, Derco,' she continued, 'what 's the matter with you? In trouble?'

When all had been explained, she said:

'Naughty girl, I thought it would come to this. And now we are to have another half-

god up here. This is dreadful, dreadful. You see what happens, Menetha? Were you not wise in choosing the Moon for a friend? Only think: a child of yours, if such should be your fate, will at least be wholly divine and fit for our society. Dreadful, dreadful. How very inconsiderate of you, Derco darling! We shall soon be crowded out of our Celestial Halls with all these new creatures.'

'My new creature,' said the other savagely, 'is never going to enter these Halls alive. I mean to kill it.'

The Great Mother replied:

'I was tempted to say the same thing in the case of every one of you. And here you all are, my dears! No, Derco. You will not kill it. Your heart will melt. But do try, darling, to keep it on earth, for it is sure to be something not very nice. That lecherous fish-element in your nature—forgive my saying so—is indifferent stuff to breed from. It is not your fault, you poor thing. You were begotten in one of your father's bad moments; there was some strange discord, some vice, in his godly ichor just then. Meanwhile, what are you doing about it? And what are your priests doing? I fear you will be in disgrace at Eskion?'

'I am in disgrace, Mother dear. They are sure to burn my temple and choose some horrid old Protector in place of me. They have threatened to do so before now. Oh, please help me out of this scrape. Make Father invent something. Menetha tried, but never got a word out of him. When you talk, he always listens——'

'And seldom answers,' added the Great Mother.

None the less, she approached her Spouse and began to draw his attention to their presence. While she yet spoke, those divine lineaments grew clearer till they were half-revealed—half, not more ; and that wonderful Voice, which had seldom been heard during the last ten thousand years, became audible once again. It said grumpily :

'How many more times are we going to be disturbed ? Are we never to have a moment's peace ? Well, what is it ? '

Before she had proceeded far in her explanation, the Voice interrupted :

'Since you are making such a fuss about it, we shall require an authentic report instead of all this vague and untrustworthy talk. Call up the Sun ! Where may he now be wandering ? '

'Over the Frozen Lands,' said Menetha, who knew a great deal.

'They can spare him awhile. Up with him!'

The Sun was on the spot in a twinkling. He, too, seemed to be flustered and embarrassed, especially when the Great Mother told him the reason for which he had been summoned. He began shyly:

'I cannot recall every detail of that encounter, but I fear it was nothing out of the common, so far as our Derco is concerned. He looked like a mortal, a beardless child. No, no! I did not see the end of it, or even the middle. A stupid wander-cloud got in the way. But I fear, I greatly fear, it was nothing out of the common——'

'Why are you blushing?' the Voice interrupted sternly.

'The things I see! My life, O Father, is one continuous blush.'

'It is time you grew out of that habit.'

At this rebuke the Sun was more abashed than ever. Then he pulled himself together with an effort and said in dignified tones:

'It is time, dear Parent, for several other things as well. Here is a point I should like to see settled: am I to give light to mortals

with due regularity? Yes, or no? If yes, then it is impossible for me to act simultaneously as Celestial Tale-bearer up here. I am always being called from my work and asked to report about matters which happen down below, and which are no concern of mine. The things I see! Believe me, it is bad enough to be obliged to witness them, without having to describe them afterwards to a crowd of jesting Gods and She-gods. Now what must mortals think of these perpetual obfuscations on my part? They are already beginning to call me names: ask the Wind! And through no fault of my own. Altogether, I am tired, utterly tired, of my hard and thankless task. Let me take this opportunity, Father, of once more begging to be relieved of my functions. Will you allow me to pour Ocean on myself and be done with it?'

No answer was vouchsafed.

The Sun persisted:

'This is my point. To carry up news is the Wind's business and not mine. Am I right, or am I wrong?'

No answer was vouchsafed.

The Sun went on sadly, as though speaking to himself:

'What a life! None of his children is more

conscientious in the performance of his duties than I, his first-born ; none works harder. And here we are again, dragged up from those poor white-faced people who enjoy only a few days of our shining in the whole long year. How glad they are of that golden light which delivers them from the bondage of the Frost-Giant Ymir and his brood ; how they dote on those tepid beams ! Is it right that they should be left in icy darkness all their lives ? O Father, let me give them a little more solace and cheer their spirits with my ruddy face. Let me go back to them ! Nobody loves me as they do.' And then he added mysteriously : ' If this unpunctuality goes on, the Hyperboreans will soon cease to worship me. And so will the rest of them. I wonder what men are saying at this moment ? I think I know.'

The Voice enquired :

' They are saying, my son ? '

' They are saying : " What can the Great Father be about, to allow his orderly child these erratic and inconvenient movements ? Have they all taken leave of their senses, up there ? We fear they have." Which may explain why certain temples are in disrepair just now, and unfrequented by mortals.'

The Voice said :

'You have not told us much. But, regarding your duties, you spoke well. Return at once to those shivering folk and comfort their cold skins. We will hear you another day when you are among the black Aethiopians, who may not be sorry to be relieved of your dazzle for a while. As to pouring Ocean on yourself—never let us hear such talk again. You were summoned because the Wind, as we all know, has grown to be a little chatterbox of late, whereas you, dear boy, can always be relied upon to tell the truth. So rest content ! Be punctual in your habits as heretofore ; shine to the utmost of your ability whatever those stupid wander-clouds may do, and try to overcome that trick of blushing. Our young Moon sees things as remarkable as you do, and has never been known to blush.

'Our young Moon, O Father, is unable to blush because he is subject to fits and because he lacks——'

'Does he ?' interposed Menetha. 'We shall soon see what he lacks. Have patience, you red-faced innocent ; just a little more patience ! I know more about him than any of you do.'

'And so you ought, dear Sister,' replied the

Sun with a bland smile. 'The rest of us can only judge by outward appearances. If he lacks nothing, you can perhaps explain why he is so anxious to hide away a cerain region in which all other gods take pride and pleasure. Night after night he contrives to keep that quarter of himself in the dark, even from mortal eyes. Why?'

'Wait and see,' said Menetha. 'The poor boy is only shy.'

'Shy!' echoed some of the others, laughing uproariously. 'Only shy! What with?'

'You are right, Menetha dear,' said the Great Mother. 'But let them joke and laugh. I feel sure you can put-him-to-rights in time.'

'I have already done so,' whispered Menetha. 'They shall soon learn the result. Then it will be my turn to joke and laugh.'

The Voice pursued:

'And now, you three Goddesses, listen! You have had your answer today. If we are to be disturbed again about trifles of this kind, you shall all taste the consequences.' Thereupon the divine lineaments softly faded away.

'I feared so,' said Menetha.

Her sister Derco, while the Sun was already

glinting downwards, pulled him back viciously by the longest of his yellow rays and asked :

'Tell me, prying mischief-maker—as you glanced over Eskion, did you see anything unusual ? '

'You are keeping me from my work. Always on the loose with young mortals. I saw you ! Leave me alone, you bawdy fish.'

'Not until you answer.'

'Well then, yes. I did. There was smoke and burning, a deal of it. Now please let go that beam of mine. What a life ! '

Perplexed and furious, the great Fish-goddess herself turned to depart—she knew not whither. Nor had she proceeded far before there arose at her back a vast shout of mirth and derision in the Celestial Halls. The news of her misadventure had spread and Immortals were laughing heartily, none more so than the Clatterer, he of the Earth, whose melodious voice she recognized and who had just returned from his latest pastime of plaguing the demon Aroudi, that wild one, in some black mountain. How he laughed ! The young Moon was also audible ; he laughed less boisterously, but more persistently ; in fact, he seemed to be quite incapable of controlling his hilarious

emotions. Would he never stop? Peal after peal of high squeaky notes rang out, each louder than the last; they ended, suddenly, in a piercing scream.

He had laughed himself into a fit.

DESPAIR, sheer despair, drove her once more to Eskion. In the shape of one of those sprightly grey-headed crows that hop about the streets and outskirts, she flew towards her black-and-vermilion sanctuary, alighted on the naked branch of a once leafy thymul, and glanced around.

The citizens had done their work. Nothing was left of her shrine save piles of ashes and scorched wooden beams. The sacred grove had been licked by flames and stretched ragged arms into the air ; the very paths were obliterated and all the precincts smothered under a confusion of charred remains. A pungent odour of burning hung about the place. Not a priest, not a worshipper, in sight ; only some few townsmen stepping cautiously among the cinder-heaps and pointing at this or that with laughable head-wagglings. And where was the tank of those darling Duri-fish ? Filled to the brim with smouldering embers ! Gazing on this desolation where all had been so fair, the Goddess-crow cocked her head on one side, and cawed

in different fashion from her fellows. She said to herself: 'They have doubtless destroyed that other one as well, that lovely one of stone.'

Thither she winged her way, and great was her surprise on reaching the rocky promontory to find that the work of building still proceeded furiously, more furiously than ever. 'They have relented,' she thought.

It was not so; and soon she knew the truth. The men of Eskion had not relented. They had found a new Protector, a Protector after their own hearts, a grave and reasonable man-god (they imagined) such as they had often prayed for in the past—found him in miraculous fashion and were even then completing this splendid sanctuary to be his abode. It was considered a wonder that during the rough wintry time of the year a ship should be able to reach the town unharmed from the remote shores of the Biluthians; that alone, in their opinion, sufficed to prove the power and goodwill of its Divine Occupant.

The Divine Occupant: who was he?

A former god of the Biluthians, all of shining metal and draped from the neck downwards in rich robes of green. He stood erect, a kindly venerable with flowing beard and

smiling mouth ; he had been sent to Eskion by the banished Babramolok who seemed in this manner to be atoning for his fault and seeking the pardon of his fellow-citizens. Nine and forty sacks of gold accompanied the deity—a gift from Babramolok to enable the temple-building to be resumed without delay.

The arrival of this God at the very moment when their Maiden Protectress was in blackest disgrace led to frenzied rejoicings among the citizens. Once more the architect's popularity knew no bounds, and if he had appeared among them just then, they might well have erected some small shrine to him also.

It was Babramolok's expedient for restoring Derco, his beloved Mistress, into the favour of her worshippers. He knew more about this particular divinity than did the men of Eskion. Had they dared—as did some of the more ancient priests who, however, kept their knowledge to themselves—had they dared to raise those rich robes of green and scrutinize more closely, they might have guessed that certain features of the god's person, rightly interpreted, could not but belie his sweet-natured countenance. A restless hunter of girls both human and divine was this grave-

seeming Immortal ; sadly neglectful, therefore, of all duties towards his worshippers !

Ages and ages ago he had been coaxed down from the Celestial Halls and, naked as he then was, artfully invested with those flowing garments, by the cantankerous but clever Colocynthians, for the express purpose of annoying their neighbours on the South, to whom they sent him as a pretended peace-offering. These folk soon discovered his weakness and contrived to pass him on, under a new name, to other races of men, and they to others, and they to others. In this fashion the mischievous old god, on the strength of his smile and trustful eyes, travelled over the whole wide world inhabiting shrines innumerable, changing name as often as he changed his residence, amusing himself vastly everywhere, and pleasing nobody but himself. Doubtless he loved the sweet smell of sacrifice. He loved even better the sweet smell of maidenly necks and breasts.

The poor Biluthians had been harassed to distraction by his amorous pranks. Their country was so full of handsome, but lazy and disreputable, god-children that they gladly presented him, through the mediation of Babramolok, to those of Eskion who were

not long in finding out that, in this particular respect, he was worse than Derco ; a source of endless trouble ; a veritable pest.

So the architect's device succeeded, in the end. For soon enough they yearned to have their former Protectress back once more.

And soon enough she returned to them, with Babramolok as her champion—she returned, a benignant Mother-goddess, while that unseemly old He-god went off elsewhere, pursuing his customary round of sport among the children of men.

Meanwhile she shook away her crow-feathers and passed wearily through trackless wastes of Ocean towards the other end of the world. She meant to glide along that broad and languid stream where she had met Linus, the cause of all her trouble—to glide upwards, ever upwards, up to its source near a blue lake among the cavernous mountains of the North. There, alone in some cold cleft, screened from the prying glances of Sun and Moon, she would await the pangs of delivery.

WHAT have gods to gain by remembering the past or thinking of what may come? The blissful present suffices them! Even so Linus was oblivious of things; such was his heritage from that deity, his father. For the rest, there was no large admixture of divine elements in his nature, and that is why, like many of his kind, he was destined to reside below rather than in the Celestial Halls. But for his godlike dreaminess and surpassing beauty, his capacity to descry an Immortal where others were blind, to fecundate a Goddess where others were impotent, he might have passed for any child of man. And of late those earthly parts prevailed exceedingly; he had grown absorbed in that peaceful life with his Ayra and sheep and horses.

Just then he was resting on his homeward way near that same stream beside a heavy pile of last autumn's canes which he had cut in the neighbouring brake. The flood was at its lowest level. Brown mud-banks lay on either side, and one or two, covered with

crocodiles, rose even out of midstream; flamingoes and other gay fowls had deserted its shores. There he rested awhile on the daisy-strewn turf to recover his breath, while the Sun looked down from a cloudless sky, giving out all the light he possibly could, but no great warmth. The land was outstretched before him in ever-narrowing streaks of green and golden wilderness; seldom had he seen the far distances so unobscured by haze. And little he knew that he himself, ere long, would deck that desolation of stone and jungle, as far as eye could reach, with many-tinted crops and waterways and landways and sparkling cities!

Now his glance alighted on the row of jagged white teeth half-way up the sky. They seemed closer than ever before, and always in the same place. What could they be? And what of that wondrous Shape which sometimes stalked among them? Some Immortal? He recalled Nea-huni's tale of how the Earth-god once came to see him in order to learn how to capture a certain vexatious Giant-Fiend called Aroudi. Could the Satyr's divine visitor be the same as he whom he had more than once seen striding across that dazzling barrier?

Of these and such-like matters he was thinking when something, out there in the water, flashed like a sheet of fire into his vision. It was that fish again, that portent, angrily crimson in hue. The creature was gliding up stream and swiftly shot past ; then, catching sight of him, turned back once more amid a mighty swirl of waters, and on the river-bank stood not Ayra, the glorified Ayra of last spring, but a wrathful Goddess—a sight to numb the senses of any mortal. Linus was unabashed. He had seen her weak and pleading ; he thought little of her divine power and was filled at that moment with an unreasonable confidence in his own. Her progress on earth was slow, for she bore a great encumbrance. She moved heavily upwards, her eyes blazing with fury.

'What,' she exclaimed, 'still alive ?'

Linus looked her up and down, from head to foot, in friendly fashion. He felt well disposed towards this once so gracious Immortal.

'Welcome, Goddess ; I know you now ! You were kind to me not long ago, when you came from far away.'

'I was kind,' she echoed, still standing at a distance from him. 'And look ! Look at this swollen waist.'

'I see,' said Linus.

'Whose child are you, to do such things?'

'My father's. He died these many years ago. And I live in the hut which you can see there by the water-side. Come with me, and rest awhile.'

She merely repeated:

'Look at your work!'

'What else did you expect?'

'For your sake I left my priests and worshippers. I came to you from the other end of the world. I came to give you pleasure,' she pursued with a sigh. 'How sweetly we frolicked in that tall poplar's shade!'

'Deliciously we played together.'

'And this is my reward.'

Her insistence and plaintiveness began to vex Linus. He felt almost contemptuous towards this abject Immortal. He replied:

'Whose fault was it? I never bade you leave your priests. I never sought you out. As to pleasure, you doubtless took what you gave. Come home with me now,' he added. 'You may like to rest and refresh yourself.'

'Wretch! They have burnt my temple and driven me out, all for my love of you.'

'What is your temple to me?'

'Oh, hard of heart,' she cried, and tears of

rage and anguish ran down her cheeks. Linus said in gentler tones :

' Why complain, Goddess ? Why complain of what has happened ? It seems to be the way of all the world. My own Ayra in that hut over there is in the same case. She is eight moons gone. Little she cares ! Why should you ? '

He was unprepared for the effect of this conciliatory speech. Instantly the divine outlines began to undergo a change. A fit of passionate trembling shook her frame ; that passed away, and thereafter it seemed to Linus as if her tall person were growing different in appearance, more ill-favoured, and shrivelling up before his eyes, while he heard the words, threateningly uttered :

' You have taken a creature of earth into your arms, after resting in mine ? '

' Jealous of a mortal, Goddess ? '

' Now,' said she, and such was the alteration that her face was already hideous and her voice came hoarse and beast-like,—' now, since the first upspringing of life, such a wrong has never yet been done. Now, by the breath of the Great Father, this is more than can be borne.'

Fear, then terror, had entered the breast of

Linus as he watched the progress of that dire transformation. Downward she dwindled in an evil mist till nothing was left of her comely shape save an excrement, a writhing excrement which slunk into the earth. Straightway, at the same spot, the ground heaved, and gaped, and out among its daisies crawled noiselessly a pale and monstrous worm, huge in girth. It dragged livid rings along the soil ; endless they seemed, as it wound towards him in loathly convolutions, the hinder parts ever buried. And now, arching itself aloft, it fell upon Linus, bearing down his body and pressing him face upwards to the ground.

Vainly he cried, struggling with fists and feet ; the horror had grown fast to him. Vermin fangs, hooked into his neck, were sucking out the warm life, while his blows grew weak as those of a little child. Gulp after gulp they drained his blood, with slow and lustful relish. At last, rosy with that banquet, the thing unfastened its dripping mouth and crept back into the earth, till it was quite withdrawn.

Then the Goddess, returning to her true shape and thinking him certainly dead, passed on to the river and touched with one divine finger the hovel he had shown her. Up flared

thatch and bitumen and wooden rafters, consuming in a great scarlet flame those poor mortals within, Ayra and her father.

Linus, during that long agony, had cried aloud. There he now lay, while his soul fluttered along the river-bank. And his immortal sire happened to hear that cry, and forthwith hastened to the spot in one of his occasional fits of kindliness. Taking the form of a grizzled old fisherman, he stood awhile by the water's edge, net in hand, peering to right and left of him. Soon he espied the soul of Linus as it flitted feebly about the herbage, in shape and size like a pale crocus-bud. He cast his net over that fluttering thing and took it to his heart and bore it to a workshop of his, deep down in the entrails of the earth, under fifty leagues of black mountain—the workshop where the demon Aroudi, that wild one, had been riveted with links of iron to a rock.

THE Fish-goddess re-entered the wintry flood. She travelled up stream, a journey of endless length for mortal feet, glinting through the cataracts, and traversing like a flash of light that dusky woodland region where the river was pressed so closely by hills on either side that the branches of trees were interwoven overhead, allowing the merest rifts of sunlight to play upon its surface. And now the water was already shrunk to a shallow brooklet. Here, in a chill, mountainous country, not far from the river's source, she stepped ashore and found her way up hill towards a many-recessed cavern frequented by doves, who reared their families in its shelving rocks. A blue lake, vast and tranquil, lay at her feet many leagues below ; the inhabitants of the land were rough hill folk, keepers of goats.

In that secret nook she remained, humiliated, and awaiting with anxiety those coming pangs which, as the Satyr had told her, proved to be a very slight affair. She thought no more of Linus : he was dead ! Her only concern was to hide her face from prying Immortals ; she

dreaded their laughter. Not one of them, she thought, would be able to discover her whereabouts in this hiding-place.

She was mistaken.

A storm raged outside. The last leaves were being torn from their oaks and tossed hither and thither, when, as she reposed full of grief in the inner part of her abode, she felt a caressing breath upon her cheek and among her dishevelled hair, and heard the whispered words :

'Sh, sh, sh, shall I tell you something ?'

There he was, swaying about in his sky-coloured shift.

'Go away, Wind ! Always chattering and making mischief and dancing around when nobody wants you. What are you doing in my cavern ? Leave me alone. Cannot you see I am not in the mood for gossip ?'

'To be sure I can,' replied the Wind breathlessly. I see everything. Not long ago I saw——'

'Go away, Wind. I care nothing for what you saw.'

'Yes, Derco, you do. I saw a charming little Worm at dinner by the riverside.'

'O Wind,' she cried, 'why recall these bitter things ? He is dead. And did he not deserve

his fate, that vile boy, who took an earthly creature into his arms after resting in mine? Have you ever heard of such a disgrace to a Goddess? Say, by what enchantment came a mortal to survive my death-dealing touch and to put me into this shameful state?'

The Wind observed:

'Menetha thinks it may do you good. She says you are too impulsive; and Menetha, you know, is the cleverest of all of us and always putting one or the other to rights. Don't you think it rather tiresome of her? It may be, Derco, that in your seclusion you have not heard the surprising news. She is in the same happy state as yourself, and, far from being ashamed, she is proud of it. Yes! Was it not wonderful of her to do with the Moon what none of us thought could be done? It proves how wrong they were to laugh at him for not being able——'

'What is the Moon to me? Go away, Wind. Take your chatter with you and leave me with my misery.'

The Wind was fond of talking. He proceeded blithely:

'I always begged them to speak with more kindness of the poor young Moon. I always said he was only shy, incredibly shy. But

which of them ever listened to me? Well, he is happy now, oh, so happy! He glitters gloriously. That dear, simple Sun would be jealous, if he were good for anything save shining and warming. As for yourself, Derco, I will help you as best I can, though you never give me credit for it, and though I really see no harm in your present state. I do not think it shameful in the least. If I were a Goddess——'

'No harm?' echoed Derco. 'No harm? Why, they have burnt my temple and made me the unhappiest Immortal that ever was. They have driven me out of Eskion. And here I am, all alone and miserable, and looking forward with anguish to what is still to come. You see no harm in that? And only because they insist on having a Virgin Protectress. Oh, why should anybody be a virgin?'

'Nobody should be a virgin,' answered the Wind. 'If I were a Goddess——'

'Go away, Wind. I am too wretched to think what you would do, if you were a Goddess.'

'Poor Derco! I feared you would be wretched. And that is why I am bringing you some comfort in your misery, although I never get anything but blame for such little favours. I came to bring you good reports

of Eskion. Not long ago I careered through its streets and discovered what I think will give you pleasure : Babramolok has returned from the Biluthians as your champion, because men are tired of the tricks of your successor, that deplorable old girl-hunter, who is almost as bad as our Clatterer in this respect——'

'How kind of you to tell me this welcome news, dear Wind ! I am indeed grateful to you.'

'Please, please do not embarrass me by gratitude,' he said. 'I am quite unaccustomed to receiving thanks ; I should not know what to do with them. But be sure they will get rid of him and call you back to Eskion sooner or later, and then you will be their Protectress once more and, I hope, a little more prudent. Poor Derco !' he continued. 'I have done my best to cheer you up. But you are not in the mood for gossip, I can see it plainly. Farewell. So you took him for a mortal, and you think him dead. Off I go . .'

He flittered away.

'Do stay one little moment,' she called after him, 'and stand still, if you can. You are more restless than you used to be, O Wind. He was no mortal, you mean ? He is still alive ? How can that be ? '

The Wind hesitated awhile. Then he said :

'I have spoken the truth. But ask no further questions, else it will mean trouble for me. I am always getting into trouble, and only because I happen to see things. They have taken to tormenting me more than ever of late ; you would not believe how dreadfully ! They call me a chatterbox, and bottle me up. Bottle him up, bottle him up : how I hate those words ! The Clatterer is the worst of them. He always begins the mischief. I daresay it amuses him to tease me in this fashion, and he cannot live, you know, without laughing. But why does he not leave me alone and laugh at mortals like the rest of us do, since the Great Father created them for that purpose ? It may be fun for him, Derco, but it is not fun for me. Would you like to be bottled up in a dark, empty vat of Myût and then sent rolling in fearful bumps about the Gardens of Bliss, up and down, and all the time to hear him laughing and egging the others on ? No fun, Derco, no fun. And that is why I am grown restless. This bottling up is bad, bad . . .'

He broke off. He was waiting for her to ask him more, but she only said :

'How horrid of them. I shall help you, Wind, if I can. I promise it.'

Then she held her peace. She knew the Wind; she knew his secret must come out. At last he drew near to her, and stood quite still for a moment.

'Perhaps,' said he, 'perhaps I had better tell you something more. Indeed, I think you should know the whole truth. So listen, Derco. That vile boy is unfortunately not altogether mortal. The Clatterer is his father, and has taken him down alive to a workshop under the earth where he keeps Aroudi tied up. I saw everything! And I cannot imagine why he should have done this, save to annoy you; I really cannot. It strikes me as most unfriendly of him. Don't you think so?'

The Fish-goddess was trembling with rage at these words.

'The Clatterer!' she cried. 'That explains everything. He shall pay for his interference in my affairs. He shall be called to account, seeing that all my misfortunes are due to that son of his, who rested in the arms of a mortal after resting in mine, and more than deserved the fate I intended for him. I shall not be content until this humiliation and disgrace have been wiped out. Listen, Wind! The

Great Father is going to judge between me and the Clatterer, even if the Celestial Halls be turned upside down. I swear it, by the life of Hapso.'

'There now,' replied the Wind. 'That means trouble again. I thought so. Nothing but trouble for me, and only because I happen to see things. Nothing but trouble for me, while the rest of you are enjoying yourselves. Nothing but trouble, all the time. Nothing but trouble, trouble, trouble . . .'

The Wind was gone.

IT was cool in that measureless chasm whose depths reverberated with clanking fetters and bellowings of rage. The noise grew louder as the Earth-god, still bearing Linus in his breast, advanced into its bleak recesses that glistened with metallic threads and streaks of moisture—so loud that the very vaults and invisible roof overhead seemed to tremble with the sound.

There at last, deep down, in a gloomy niche, he came face to face with his old antagonist Aroudi. The Giant-Fiend was riveted to the rock by a chain. He lay sprawling and twisting in a fearful knot of muscular limbs and red tufts of hair ; all red he was, and his single bloodshot eye glared ferociously at the visitor who stood still awhile, viewing his captive with a smile of contentment, and then began cheerily :

' Well, Monster, uncoil yourself a moment. Shut that little mouth of yours. How goes it ? '

Aroudi replied, and his voice rang out proudly, with rough and noble sincerity :

' Parched and thirsty ! Give me the bowl

again, though I begin to understand why you gave it me once before.'

'Why?'

'To make me thirstier than ever. Give me the bowl none the less, you vile one. Ah, if I could snap my fetters and bound at you! How I would fix my teeth in those fat cheeks of yours! How I would toss my head from side to side and tear them out!' He gnashed his fangs and tugged furiously at the chain.

'Try to be polite,' said the Earth-god. 'You are cleverer than I thought, Aroudi,' he went on. 'You have guessed part of the truth. But not all of it! The bowl not only makes you thirstier than before; it contains a cure for your wild ways, a wonderful cure. And you shall have it presently. Let me look at you first, to see whether our medicine works. You have improved, Monster. Yes! We are boiling you down to reasonable proportions, and then you will cease to be a menace to mortals and a distraction to myself. That horrible musky odour of yours—it seems to be evaporating. You have lost a jungle of hair since my last visit, and your voice is softer than it was.'

Aroudi retorted:

'Whether that drink softens my voice or not, it will never soften my contempt for you and all your ways. Have you not learnt that our Demon-race is constant of purpose? We know what we want: have you forgotten that? Have you forgotten that there is a spark in me also, divine and inextinguishable? It defies you! How much longer is this imprisonment to last?'

'Till you are fit to be released, which you soon will be, at this rate of wasting. It is not in my nature to cause unnecessary pain. Be glad of it. Had you won that little contest of ours, you would not have been satisfied with what I am doing. You would have acted more harshly.'

'More frankly,' replied the demon. 'I should have spitted you over the cup of some burning mountain, and left you there to frizzle out your politeness and double-dealing in rivers of fat.'

The Earth-god only said, as though indulging in some pleasant recollection:

'How charmingly he danced, the drunken Aroudi, after he lapped up the dear Satyr's mixture! How he threw his pretty arms into the air, and wobbled about, and sang a wild song or two! Then he rolled himself in the

grass, and snored and snored. What happened then? Ah! And what is happening now? Now he tugs at his chain, and drinks good medicine, and grows handsomer every day. We shall soon not know him for what he was. I must look for a little she-demon, to keep him company down here. What a lovely brood they will beget!'

Yells of rage greeted this insulting speech. The fiend was beside himself. He sprang high in air, up and down, clutching madly at his captor. It seemed as if those massive links must break with the strain. They held fast; slowly the howling and writhing died away Aroudi grew calm once more and said bitterly:

'You caught me by guile, and with the help of others. Now, it seems, you are trying to break my spirit by guile. All guile! That is what you learn from your friendship with slaves of the earth, Satyrs and mortals. Those delving labourers—what joy it was, not long ago, to blight the harvest of their hands and let the earth be fresh again as in the days before they came to befoul it with their works! And this abject Immortal loves them. He ministers to their wants. He is their slave. Give me that bowl, you slave of slaves.'

'Drink, Monster, and grow weaker. I

shall pass here presently on my way out. Then you may have another sip.'

The Earth-god stepped aside and drew forth a vast ever-brimming cup of luscious poison which he placed within reach of Aroudi, who snatched it up, and, amid a formidable gurgling as of waters sucked into a gulf, drank avidly nor ever paused to breathe. Then, in a sudden fit of anger or despair, he dashed the vessel from him and moved away as far as he could. There he crouched in silence, nestling against the rock and musing on what he had done. He had yielded a second time to the torture. Was it possible that by quenching the intolerable thirst he lost a portion of his divinely savage nature? Would he really grow weaker with every drop of that insidious mixture, or was the Earth-god only mocking when he spoke of his altered voice and appearance?

He was not mocking. He was speaking the truth. The cool liquid even then became hot and pernicious as it travelled through his frame, minishing the force of his muscles, draining away all relish of that existence so precious to him—that sweet lonely life among woodlands and deserts and mossy fountains. Weaker and weaker, and himself chained up in

darkness ! Ever thirsty ! Where would it end ?

Thus thinking of his present degradation and that delectable freedom of old, the immortal Wild One pressed himself more closely against the rock, as though he would creep within, and his body was convulsed with spasms of grief.

THE Earth-god had moved away. He was more thoughtful than usual. The mention of Nea-huni reminded him of what he had almost forgotten—his promise to the old bull-face. That boundless untilled plain, that eyesore to which the Moon had once jeeringly alluded, should now be thronged with life as in the golden days of the Satyrs. What better instrument could he find for this transformation than Linus, his own son? And the Satyr's companion, Azdhubal, should likewise be restored to him.

On reaching the well-stored laboratory where sprouted germs of many living things, he drew from his breast that little soul. It had been changing ceaselessly in the heavenly warmth, and was now again blossomed into the semblance of a young mortal all tremulous and limp, with blue veinlets coursing about its skin, like some tiny child that never saw the daylight. He breathed a ruddier glow into the white flesh and stiffened its fibres with cunning hand, while the old smile crept back into the face of Linus, settling about his

mouth and eyes. Then the Earth-god revealed himself for what he was and gave him greater wisdom and discernment, and taught him something of the generations of gods and men, and how he should set about his future task in the wilderness down there. Linus listened wonderingly and was learning a great deal when the Earth-god his father, divinely wayward, broke off in the middle of these important explanations :

'I think I am in the mood for a frolic. Let us go to the Colocynthians.'

'Colocynthians ?'

'A certain tribe of mortals. You may come with me, and learn to laugh like a god.'

So saying, he set the child astride his immortal hip after the fashion of a Colocynthian mother and issued from that workshop. They passed the spot where Aroudi lay fastened to a rock. The demon of single aim and purpose was all huddled up. He neither spoke nor stirred.

'Farewell, Aroudi,' said the Earth-god. 'And just look at this little object. It is a son of mine, though you might not believe it. By and by, when he is less frail, he is going to make an end of your mischief in that absurd and dreary plain where you used to give me

so much trouble with your floods and droughts and caterpillars.'

The fiend cast his eye contemptuously upon Linus and said never a word.

'Perhaps you would like a sip of good medicine before I go?'

'I shall not touch the drug again.'

'It would make you prettier than ever.'

Aroudi's only answer to this mockery was an appalling and objectionable explosion of noise.

'Try to be polite, Monster.'

It was then that the grief-stricken but untameable demon said:

'I had rather be frank than polite. Now hearken, Earth-god, to one of immortal race like yourself. Hearken to one who, unlike yourself, is not torn about by whims and caprices. Hearken! You are not famous for understanding among your deathless companions, and yet you have intelligence enough to know that the balance between us two would have been better kept if that Great Father of yours had not been sulky and half asleep these many thousand years, and stupider than ever. He would not have allowed the Satyr Nea-huni, whom he dislikes so thoroughly and whose plodding and frowzy race he has

so rightly damned to extinction—he would never have allowed that bull-faced excrement to teach you how to entangle me. Such is the way of all your immortal brood—shifty and flighty and forgetful——'

'Such is our way. Such is our divine privilege, Aroudi. Shifty and flighty! We do what we please; we are not tied down to single purposes, like you poor demons. Shifty and flighty! I have heard this kind of talk more than once. It is true enough, but not at all amusing. Say something else.'

The demon went on, more earnestly:

'Think what you do in keeping me chained here and encrusting the Earth with your favourites, who are as sordid in their arts of hiving and delving as those ridiculous Satyrs of old. Why do you encourage them?'

'It amuses me.'

'It will not always amuse you. I foresee the day when you will grow out of your fondness for such grovelling creatures, when every fair spot has been scarred by their hands and deformed to their mean purposes, the rivers made turbid and hills and forests levelled away and all the wild green places smothered under cities full of smoke and clanking metal; when the Sun himself, the steadiest of your

inconstant brood, will refuse to peer down through their foul vapours——'

'The Sun, Aroudi, always does what he is told.'

'I am sorry to hear it,' replied the demon with a tinge of sadness in his voice. 'I thought he had more spirit and better taste. Now think before it is too late. You are fostering a generation of toilers and hoarders. Know that whoever hoards grows envious of fellow-hoarders and full of guile. Soon, multiplied a myriadfold, they will be at discord among themselves, each hacking his neighbour in pieces out of sheer love of gain. Then, be sure, the wiser among them will begin to ask whether life be as pleasant as it was in my day, and whether their protector be not making fools of them and laughing to himself, as he often does. Beware, Earth-god, lest they learn to laugh at you ! Beware lest they grow sharp-witted enough to see through your tricks ! It amuses you for the moment to be friendly with them. So be it. But let me at least remain Haunter of their Outskirts where the desert, the dear desert, begins ; where mountains rise up and streamlets run clear. Let me be friend to those few guileless ones who neither hoard nor toil nor quarrel,

but dream alone in solitary places. Let me out!'

'Words, Aroudi.'

'Words, Earth-god. There is room for them in your empty head.'

'Immortals are too busy to listen to such ravings. I go to visit the Colocynthians.'

'To tease them, no doubt, because they are the tidiest of their kind. Such is your polite dealing and your consistency! And only because you like to laugh at them. I am too weary and too thirsty to say more. Besides, what is the use of talking to this scatter-brained Immortal? He cannot live without laughing. Just laugh at this, before you go'—and there followed a second thunderous detonation.

'Incurably wild,' said the Earth-god with a sigh. Then, having no answer ready to a vocal argument of this nature, he gave vent to a snort of rage that would have uprooted a mountain and left the frank monster to himself.

Linus enquired, as they were moving forward:

'Some God?'

'Only a demon. You may meet him again. I mean to let him out, one of these days.'

'The rude noises he makes! He looks dreadfully bad. I hope you will not let him out too soon, Father.'

'How like a frightened earth-born creature you speak! Your mother's blood—whoever she may have been. Don't be afraid. No Immortal ever makes a mistake, least of all your stupendous Parent.'

Now, whether the Earth-god came to be moved by Aroudi's impressive and prophetic appeal, or by some streak of kindliness which caused him to forget all he had suffered in the past from the violence of that Giant-Fiend, or whether he acted, as usual, just for fun—whatever the motive may have been, he presently did set him free again. That was a mistake; and such are the ways of Immortals! Forthwith the mischief recommenced. Aroudi, weakened though he was, regained his former strength among the savage glens he loved, and once more gave an infinity of trouble. He proved an obstinate opponent not only to Linus but to all those others who, in later times, tried to torture the earth out of its first fair shape into unlovely purposes of their own. Moreover, he had learnt his lesson and grown too wary ever to let himself be caught again.

Many have tried, and none succeeded.

That is why he remains to this day Haunter of Outskirts ; foe to toilers and quarrellers, and friend to those who dream in lonely places.

SOON they were traversing obliquely that icy barrier of mountains—those white teeth half-way up the sky which Linus had often seen from his hut by the river-bank. Far down on either side stretched an immensity of plain ; that which faced the rising Sun, the land of the Colocynthians, lay before them in many-hued patches of cultivation, intersected by a crazy network of waterways with cities and pink towers in between ; the other, soon to be reclaimed by Linus, was nothing but a desolation of marsh and jungle and rocky desert save where, along the shores of that broad stream, a few miserable settlements showed themselves.

Thence in one mighty flight they descended to that richer plain, and took their stand near a place that was thronged with strange and serious folk intent upon their business.

It was here that the Earth-god, smiling, tapped the soil ever so lightly with his club.

Linus saw the houses sway, while blocks of

stone jumped out of their places ; he heard a crash of falling material and watched the people scattering wildly in the direction of their feather-cane tufts, tripping over long gowns and losing silver-tipped shoes as they ran along. The Earth-god laughed immoderately.

'This is sport!' he declared. 'This is better than teasing the stupid Aroudi. Does it not amuse you? Have you nothing to say?'

Linus looked at the damage and thought awhile. Then he remarked :

'It strikes me, Father, that you see things with the eyes of a God. Or am I less divine than I ought to be? Anyhow, I see no great fun in this. You ask what I have to say. Well, I suppose they could run better if they had no clothes on. And they must be annoyed with you just now. And it will take some time to build up those houses again. I can think of nothing else to say.'

'How like an earthly creature you speak! Your mother's blood again—whoever she may have been. These mortals have no sense of fun ; they are too full of ailments and sad thoughts. Their very laughter smells of death. And even you half-gods—you never enjoy

yourselves as you ought. You see them running for their lives? They are doing it beautifully! They will begin to curse me presently, and that is still more amusing. I shall now visit their fat old man, who is sure to be more enraged than all the rest of them.'

The ruler of the Colocynthians, the Nameless One, that marvel among mortals, had sat for many years propped up at the end of a low shrine which was built, not of stone, in a waving grove of feather-canes. His life was too precious to be risked in any of these recurrent catastrophes. Unseen by priest or guard they entered the dim chamber where that august personage reclined alone, and, though stepping more cautiously than usual, the Earth-god contrived to knock over some jars of priceless Umbosto perfume as he moved along. The other appeared to be unaware of this disturbance. He sat motionless on his haunches, the only one of his race who, in proof of purity, was allowed and even obliged to remain naked from head to foot.

All around stood bowls of sacred Tarbinjoram flowers, the scent of whose white blossoms was supposed to be his only nourishment.

One would never have thought so, for his trunk and legs and arms were creased with immense rolls of fat. No hair grew on his head or anywhere else ; moreover, his whole body had been thinly sprinkled with gold dust which the priests washed off six times a day with tepid milk—some said it was thus he derived the strength to live—and then renewed. There he sat like a golden egg among those snowy blossoms, staring down at his toes that projected from under his thighs and twiddled ceaselessly like those of a little child. It was the only sign of life he gave. He was thinking of his people, and lost in lovely speculations about their welfare.

'Ho, wake up there ! You know me ? '

The other replied without stirring, and his accents bubbled toneless as a fountain out of that round mouth :

'I am not deaf. And we all know you for a bungler.'

'A polite lump of grease,' said the Earth-god. 'Shall I give your people another shake ? It might be amusing.'

'The poor Clatterer. He is easily amused.'

'Or would you like these wooden rafters tumbled about your own head ? '

'Tumble them, you laughable nuisance. If that is what you came for, why waste my time talking?'

No very friendly encounter so far.

'Tell me this,' said the Earth-god in gentler tones. 'Is it not unworthy of the Colocynthians, the oldest and best of mortals, to make such a fuss about a few broken temples and shambangoos? You can build new ones.'

'Why build new ones, if they are to be smashed again? Tell me that.'

While he yet spoke, two ancient and withered priests whose privilege it was to attend to the personal wants of the Nameless One, showed themselves at the entrance of the apartment, staggering under the weight of an open chest which appeared to be loaded with gold dust, and bearing towels and sponges and milk and other objects requisite for one of his periodical ablutions. The gold dust, however, occupied only a shallow tray at the top of the chest. Underneath were several others loaded with an assortment of choice viands. Six times every day was the Nameless One fed in such a fashion, devouring at each meal enough to suffice an ordinary Colocynthian for a week; none but these two priests knew the secret.

They now withdrew again, on hearing his voice. It was nothing unusual for them to surprise him thus, in converse with a deity, although he himself was always glad when Immortals chose moments other than these for honouring him with their presence. He liked to eat at regular hours.

An idea had occurred to the Earth-god. He enquired :

' How would it be, if I ceased my visits to your country ? '

' It would be a pleasant change.'

' I am inclined to do it.'

' I should be surprised—pardon my frankness—if you could resist the temptation.'

There was a pause. Then the Earth-god began again :

' You know Aroudi ? '

At these words the Nameless One glanced up from his toes with something like a smile and said :

' We knew him well enough formerly. He was almost as objectionable as yourself, if you will pardon my frankness once more. Then we managed to drive him out with the help of the Satyrs who were our teachers in many things, and built finer houses and reaped richer harvests than we can ever hope to do

Those Satyrs! Will their day ever come again? Far be it from me to question the Great Father's wisdom, yet I cannot help thinking that for once in a way he committed a blunder in striking down that noble brood who did so much to embellish the earth. For what are even my handsome and refined Colocynthians in comparison to them? And no other race of mortals is to be mentioned in the same breath with ourselves. As to Aroudi — he haunts the desert on the sunset side of the crystal mountain.'

'Your information is not up to date,' replied the Earth-god. 'I have tied him to a rock, and this little half-god here is going to undo all his mischief, and populate the wilderness you speak of till it has become as beautiful as your own country.'

'Congratulations.'

'He may be glad of your friendship and alliance later on.'

'He can count on that, provided we have no more of your clatterings out here.'

Thus might have been laid the foundations of a united realm which would have extended from the rising to the setting Sun, had the Earth-god been able to stick to his project

of not molesting these people in future. But he was forgetful, dreadfully forgetful, and far too fond of laughing; he teased them again from time to time, and so it came about that the Colocynthians, thin-skinned as they were and incapable of appreciating this kind of pleasantry, were obliged, in that grand Embassy which afterwards appeared at the Court of Linus, to endeavour to complain to him of his father's idea of a joke and then to break off relations altogether.

Meanwhile the Earth-god nodded assent, while the other, growing more and more affable, and twitching his toes twice as excitedly as before, proceeded:

'Strange, that it should amuse you to tease us in this deplorable fashion. Strange indeed! I am the wisest mortal on earth: so much is certain. And why? Because I never cease to investigate whatever happens and to search out its reason; because nothing is too great and nothing too small, and nothing too near and nothing too far, for me to puzzle about. I have no desire to praise myself, but, as you doubtless know, I generally contrive to find a reason for everything, and the right reason too. And yet, puzzle as I may, I fail to dis-

cover any adequate motive for your unfriendly behaviour towards us. Have we offended you in some particular? If so, I shall be delighted to make all the reparation in my power. They say you are jealous of our wonderful plantations. Is that possible? I wish I knew the reason! Or do you shake us about because you like to laugh at the consequences? In that case, why cannot you laugh at Immortals who—pardon my frankness—are sufficiently ridiculous at times, without bothering about these poor people of mine? Are you annoyed at the little nickname which we gave you? But no. That would be unworthy of a deity. I do wish I knew the reason! Now that you are here, would you be so very kind as to enlighten me? It would be the greatest favour you could bestow on one who is the wisest mortal on earth and who nevertheless, puzzle as he may——'

At this moment the speaker realized that he was addressing his snowy Tarbinjoram blossoms and nothing else. The divine visitor had departed.

'How like an Immortal,' he murmured, 'to evaporate as soon as the conversation begins to show signs of growing instructive! And this poor floppy Thing will never be able

to stick to his undertaking. The hours one wastes with these gods . . . Here is something more to the point,' he added, clapping two fat hands together as a signal for the priests to enter with their tray.

THE Earth-god, as they were gliding along, observed to Linus :

'You heard the tedious mortal asking for reasons? Never, my son—never ask for reasons and never give them. Here is something more to the point' ; and so saying he snapped up from the fields a little Colocynthian girl, tidy and comely, with eyes that knew no guile, and all swathed in the intricate and splendid draperies of that fastidious race, to be the playmate of Linus for a time under the earth, in a certain dark workshop, until the rancorous Derco of Eskion should have forgotten her rage against him and found some new distraction.

'Keep her,' he went on, 'till you find a companion more worthy of your divine mettle. It is not good for boys to be lonely. I am all for frolics and fertility, and so will you be. Only remember this : never, my son—never frolic with a fish.'

'I know,' said Linus.

Down there, in a twinkling, the Earth-god put the finishing touches to his work in order

that Linus, when he presented himself among mortals, should no longer be mistaken for anything but what he was ; that mankind, in short, should instantly recognize his divine origin. While taking away his former gift of descrying Immortals, which might get him into trouble, as well as that other one, of fecundating Goddesses, which had already done so, he gave him a fierce and godlike nature, a more than human energy and understanding. He sharpened all his faculties. No dreamy and forgetful child, but a mighty ruler was to arise among men, to proclaim himself restorer of ordered ways in that desolate plain, and lay the foundations of a realm which should rival the Colocynthian country in prosperity and extent. Having accomplished this easy task, the Earth-god departed for his own Celestial Halls, well pleased with himself, as usual.

And Linus was not long in finding reason to be pleased with his divine sire when, left to themselves, he drew his companion nearer to him and glanced into her dear little face, startled though it still was, and wearing not the semblance of a smile. For it was plain that the Earth-god had chosen with his customary judgment ; and how right he had

been, thought Linus, in saying that sport such as this was more to the point than asking for reasons !

The playmate, on the other hand, was by no means pleased with Linus ; not at first. He was hardly to blame, for his love-experiences had been few. What could he know of the habits of the Colocynthians, and how that they made a rite of every act of their lives and were accustomed to do nothing whatever, not so much as soap their hands, save according to rules derived from long-established usage ? Being unaware of these precedents, he was a little hasty and ignorant and rough, to her way of thinking ; so rough that at one moment she began to cry, and, as he straightway desisted in surprise at her tears, to make it clear to him that, like all girl-children of the oldest and best of mortals, she had been instructed in what order things should proceed on such critical occasions by her mother, who made her repeat the lecture every evening, lest she should be disgraced in the eyes of a future bridegroom who, in his turn, was carefully trained as to the part he had to play in the complicated ceremonial.

' That is not mother's way, my good person,' she said reproachfully when, with natural

awkwardness and caresses to which he received no return, he fumbled about, endeavouring to untie and unwind and unbutton and unlace and unhook those never-ending garments. She had been taught to anticipate something utterly different in circumstances such as these : a month wasted in preliminary mumbling of charms and the recital of little speeches, to each of which there was a set reply ; after that, pilgrimages to shambangoos and fumigations and sprinkling of Umbosto perfume and three separate sacrifices on three separate days and, after that, an infinity of ablutions and hygienic precautions and formalities ; since the Colocynthians, ever mindful of what is expected of them, proceeded even in certain intimate and expansive moments of life with an almost superhuman deliberation, for fear of shaking the lyxas powder out of their lovingly crimped hair.

What could Linus be expected to know of this ? He went ahead once more, full of boyish impatience.

' That is not mother's way ! ' she cried still louder as, more by luck than anything else, he succeeded in unravelling the last shred of those gorgeous habiliments. They fell to earth, all of them ; all save a little amulet,

star-shaped, that hung about her neck. Now she found no particular reason for speaking again. He held her fast as his divine sire would have done, and as no mortal has the wit to do, till suffering had melted into joy, till she lost all fear and grew tremulous with delight, realizing how much more pleasurable was this ceremony than that which her mother had described, and breathing shy, earthly kisses after the manner of her kind. Only then did Linus relax his hold, and then only for a moment. Instantly she found herself once more in the arms of the delicious young half-god to whom no playful violence came amiss, who never wearied of inventing new love-tricks and took so many pains to teach her the sweet lore he had learnt, under a shady poplar tree, from the Fish-goddess of Eskion that, in less time than it seemed possible, she knew it all as well as he did.

'O Linus,' she then said, 'I like your way best.'

Many fair frolics were yet to fall to his lot, but none of more portentous issue.

From this brief and lovely union there sprang a brood of fighters—lusty men who not long afterwards, pouring in from the North, overran the fields of the Colocynthians, tumbled

their pink towers, wiped out what learning they had gotten from Satyrs of old, and stamped on them new ways of life and a new rule with such terrible thoroughness that the very name of those fretful but artful people has faded from the memory of mankind.

NIGHT had fallen on earth, a tepid night in the flower-time of the year, and all was drenched in magic. The Moon shone more brightly than he had ever shone before, shone so gloriously as to make the trees and grass all green, to light up the darkest corners of the land and put the very Sun to shame. He was uncommonly well pleased with himself!

None of his old friends, had they been still alive, would have recognized Linus again as he lay there asleep by the river-side, at the foot of an aged poplar tree. Hovering between youth and manhood, he was now taller than the tallest of them, and stronger and nobler of aspect; nor could any have matched his resourcefulness. There he lay dreaming, newly arrived among mortals, re-fashioned and oblivious of his own past, while a perfume, a perfume different to what he had lately been breathing, a perfume strange and yet well known, was invading his slumber. The arrowy odour of mint—it played upon his drowsy senses like the caress of a long-forgotten friend. It seemed to say: 'Wake up!

Don't you remember me? Wake up . . .' He opened his eyes and glanced around.

There lay the old scene, glimmering in pale-green radiance—the river at his feet with sandy reaches, the endless plain, and, ever so far away, those jagged white teeth rising into the sky. He knew it, and he knew it not.

'Where have I seen this before?' he wondered. 'And how dreary and desolate it looks; how horrible, how unlike . . . unlike . . .' there flashed through his mind visions of another plain all teeming with life and sprinkled with cities full of trim and tidy folk. And suddenly he saw that he was not alone. A figure stood beside him in the clear moonlight. Linus took it for a child, a child of twelve years or so; such it might have been but for what escaped his eye—the divinely fashioned limbs, and the absence of those clouds of fear and perplexity that flit across the countenance of the fairest young mortal, troubling its composure and marking it as human. It was a little boy-god, and he lived among the flowers. Smiling, he said:

'Look at the Moon over there! He used to be so sad, don't you remember? Now he is ever so happy. And I know why. Do you?'

'I know nothing about the Moon, child, and I don't care whether he is happy or not. But what are you doing here? And what is the matter with this country; why is it so bleak and different to what it should be? Somebody must make an end of this!'

'Then you don't know,' the other went on, 'what is happening in the Celestial Halls just now? Nothing but fun! But I think there will be trouble, once Derco has had her baby. Because we know all about that baby and where it came from; the Wind told us everything, even about her cavern. Yes, trouble! I think he is going to be bottled up again and rolled about, like last time. Serve him right, for gossiping! As to the country here—take my advice and leave it to the Clatterer. It is his business.'

Linus understood not a word of this speech. He said:

'Funny child, are you perhaps talking in your dreams? And don't you know that you ought to be with your mother at night? I shall take you there at once, or some lion will have you.'

The other laughed merrily and said:

'I must have made a blunder. I thought you were an Immortal; you looked so like

one of our own race, lying there asleep. Fancy not knowing about the Moon ! It shows you are only some poor half-god. Never mind ! Come with me to the Satyrs ; there are two of them again since this morning—the same two as long ago, and they know all about this country. They will tell you why it is dreary, if you care to listen to that babble of theirs, which is still drearier.'

So swift was their progress that, hand in hand and blithely chatting, they reached the foot of the Satyr's hill soon after daybreak. Then began the ascent up that stairway of hewn stones under the shade of mighty trees. To Linus it seemed like a dimly remembered dream. One thing, however, immediately struck him as he looked around—the orderly beauty of the place. He said :

' Now this is how that wretched wilderness should be, and shall be——'

' You are a queer half-god, to talk like that. Why not leave things as you find them ? You must be one of the Clatterer's endless family ; he is so fond of order and fertility. And yet he cannot resist teasing the dear Colocynthians, who have such wonderful flowers in their gardens . . . listen ! '

They had mounted the last flight of stairs

and were now face to face with that immense rose-tinted structure. On their right lay an arbour thickly overgrown with the young leaves of spring ; voices issued from within it.

'Who is talking?' enquired Linus in a whisper, as they stepped nearer.

They listened.

'You hear them?' asked the little boy-god. 'They think they know everything, and only because they wear horns ; only because they happen to wear horns. Musty old Satyrs, telling each other old news and taking each other quite seriously! No ; they are too ridiculous . . .' the warm little hand, which Linus was even then holding, began to melt out of his own.

An instant more, and the pretty companion had dissolved away.

WHILE Linus was yet lost in amazement at this proceeding, there began again a certain voice, a voice he seemed to have heard in the distant past. It was Nea-huni's, and it said :

'That started the mischief. Of course you remember Eskion, the gloomy black place at the other end of the world where we walked once or twice—and a good long walk it was, you remember? Well, Babra-molok got his share of the blame, and I daresay they have driven her out by this time. It seems she was not the right kind of virgin for them.'

'Nor for me,' said another voice, gruff and hearty. 'You know, Nea-huni, I distrust every kind of fish, whether God or mortal.'

'So do I, my friend ; so do I. No fish for me.'

The other voice recommenced :

'Now please tell me everything once more from beginning to end. You may have forgotten something. Oh, pardon me ! It is

so long since we met. I forgot you never forget anything.'

'It is the pleasantest experience of my life,' replied Nea-huni, 'and that is all. I went to sleep alone, as I have done these many years; maybe I dreamt about you, as I often did. In the morning, there you were.'

'Here I am. So the Clatterer has kept his promise, because you helped him to catch Aroudi. That was civil of him, I must say. And now I should not be surprised if he lets him out again, just for fun.'

'Neither should I. Nothing surprises me, where Immortals are concerned. What a brood they are, Azdhubal; so forgetful, so dreadfully forgetful, so gross in their ideas of fun, so vindictive and shameless and unreasonable, and then, all of a sudden, some unexpected streak of politeness!'

Azdhubal continued:

'What do you think, Nea-huni? Will he now send that girl of his, that half-mortal, to clear up what you call the disorder down there?'

'It was a boy.'

'So it was! Will he keep that part of his promise as well?'

'Oh, surely.'

'Not that I care,' Azdhubal went on, 'what happens to the plain and whether it is inhabited by human kind or not. I like it well enough as it is, now that our own race no longer lives there. To tell you the truth, Nea-huni, I never shared your infatuation for mortals and their works, though I can understand it. You love them, because you have been their friend and helper. But believe me, whatever mortals do, is bound to end in smoke. To the crocodiles, with all of them!'

'Please don't say that, my dear old friend. I should be sorry to see the poor fools go.'

'To the crocodiles!'

'Only think,' Nea-huni objected, 'what the Colocynthians have accomplished, thanks to our teaching.'

'It will end in smoke. To the crocodiles, with all of them!'

'You are the same as ever, Azdhubal, and I love you for it. A handsome child, I remember; his name was Linus . . .'

On hearing these words, Linus was moved to pass through the enclosure and stand before them. Nea-huni caught sight of him and remarked cheerily:

'Ah! and welcome. We were just talking about you; now here you are. This is certainly the happiest day of my whole life, and that disreputable father of yours, I confess, has behaved surprisingly well for once in a way. What splendid hair he has given you: like a torrent of ripe corn! Anybody can see you are a half-god, Linus. You will soon find that out, when you meet your first mortal. My compliments. Do you recollect the old Satyr?'

Linus, quite at his ease, glanced from one to the other. There was something familiar in the looks of Nea-huni and the tone of his voice. As to Azdhubal—no. He differed a good deal from his friend. He was of tougher build and almost white-haired, with truculent features and the straightforward, simple ways of an old fighter. His limbs were scarred with ancient wounds; the tip of his left horn was missing—knocked off in a tussle with some villainous rock-fiend; he also limped slightly: he had forgotten during what bout, ages ago, he came by that infirmity. Now he surveyed Linus with critical eye, and observed:

'See, Nea-huni! He has got better muscles than many of these half-gods. I like that.

He ought to do well.' Then, turning to Linus : 'What, don't you know your old friend? I am sure he gave you something good to eat when you came here as a little boy.'

'I do,' answered Linus ; 'and yet I don't. It is an odd feeling. I must have seen his face somewhere, and I think—yes! I remember perfectly well. He used to crunch up his visitors. Does he do it still?'

'Now that is too bad of the Great Father,' said Nea-huni. 'Will the old story never die out?' . . .

For sixty days Linus remained on that hill-top as guest of the Satyrs, learning all they knew of the craft of husbandry and city-building and how to regulate the waters. Of the art of warfare alone they were unable to teach him much, since they had always been creatures of peace or else fighters in single combat like Azdhubal who, for the rest, taught him all he knew about such things. They were astonished and delighted at his penetration ; so well had his divine parent equipped him that he seemed to know beforehand everything they told him and to remember it unfailingly. Even the Colocynthians, for all their cleverness, had been slower of wit. They were mortals.

'We shall meet again,' they told him, as he set out on his task. 'Meanwhile, you will find plenty of earthly companions. Move northward, up stream. The river grows tractable to the North and unmanageable to the South; it broadens out and loses itself in endless swamps. The country down below will never be reclaimed; we have been there, we two; it is a watery desolation. Always up-stream; and farewell!'

The old Satyrs were right; Linus found no lack of helpers. What amazed him was to see the signs of reverence with which these mortals greeted him. He knew, then, what it was to be a half-god; their behaviour plainly showed that they took him for a deity who had come to visit and rule over them. And, the news spreading, men flocked to him till the land seemed emptied of its inhabitants. For the space of two years he moved slowly up stream, traversing no great stretch of country but carrying out most thoroughly the Satyr's suggestions—inventing new devices to overcome every obstacle that lay across his path, instructing his adherents, extirpating jungles and wild beasts, draining the marshes, cutting canals here and there, planting and sowing, founding settlements and giving names to

them ; so he moved along, while new followers trooped continually to his side, till, in the first month of the third year, he encountered a new kind of obstacle, and an unpleasant one

IN that secluded nook, meanwhile, the Fish-goddess lay beside her new-born child—a girl, as Nea-huni had predicted. The rage which she expected to feel at the appearance of this helpless little thing had never assailed Derco ; her very nature seemed to have undergone a change. Outside, hills and forests were glittering with snow, and icicles hung thickly at the cavern's mouth ; within, all was warmth and love. Never yet had she experienced such glows of affection, while she fed it with that divine milk and fondled its tiny limbs, watching for its smile and calling it a thousand endearing names. How she doted on it !

The long winter slipped by. Spring came, and with it a rustle of wings ; the doves were flocking in silvery clouds from the South to rear their families in those shelving rocks. Now Derco grew restless and mindful of that former grudge against him of the Earth. The mother-mood was waning : such are Immortals !

Ere returning to the Celestial Halls she descended, in a last access of kindliness, to

where a shepherd and his wife lived in a hut and pastured some goats on a green meadow by the hill-side. There, taking the form of a white kid, she stood near the man, who pursued the frolicsome beast through brakes and gullies and always uphill, trying vainly to capture it. She led him on, right into the cavern's mouth. Suddenly the kid was gone from before his eyes, and the shepherd, looking round in astonishment, saw lying there, all by itself, a dainty infant that smiled sweetly into his face. Raising it with tenderness, he began to carry it towards his home. Straightway the doves, busy as they were at this season, rose from their rocks and, forgetful of nests and younglings, with one accord fluttered round the child and never left its side. The shepherd and his wife, amazed at this prodigy, determined to call her Symira, which in their language signified a dove.

She had grown up with them, strong and lovely, of her mother's dusky loveliness, beyond the measure of mortal child; surrounded by these lascivious fowls and the still more lascivious goats, and seeing little else all day long save the love-pranks of both of them. Menetha, Goddess of Wisdom, was often heard to declare in the Celestial Halls that this was

not the right schooling for a little half-goddess, and that Derco's infant would later on be differently minded were she now only brought up in different surroundings. 'Wait and see,' she would say to those of them who laughed at her words. Maybe she was right, as events seemed to prove. Maybe those others were not wrong when they said that surroundings counted for nothing in a case of this kind. What could be expected, they asked, of any child of their impulsive Derco?

Be that as it may, her charms quickly grew to be such that the shepherd's wife became jealous of the girl, and persuaded the simple man to take her down to that settlement by the lake-side and present her as a gift to Oannes. 'A huge reward you will get!' she told him.

This Oannes was an astute and violent and lecherous creature who, by dint of perpetual fighting, had made himself master of the whole region. Wrapped in wolfskins, with tousled black hair and beard, and coils of muscle in every part of his body, and eyes that glowed like flames, Oannes was the terror of mankind. When Symira was shown to him, he gave her one keen glance and then enquired ferociously of the man:

'And why, you worm, have you kept her to yourself all this time?'

'Because . . . because . . .' the shepherd began tremblingly. 'Because . . .'

'Shall I help you to talk?' asked Oannes, driving the point of his sharp spear a finger's length into his buttocks.

'Oh, oh! Because I feared, my master, if I brought her still younger . . . I feared you would give me no reward for her.'

'You want a reward? You shall have one. This,' he said, cutting off the man's nose and ears, and then his hands and feet, and on second thoughts, his head as well—'this shall be your reward, for bringing her so soon.'

Oannes became the first of Symira's unnumbered mortal lovers.

It was strange, she often thought later on, that not one of them should fulfil her maidenly dreamings of how such things should be She always craved for a different experience—something better, fuller; she never, save once, encountered it. Meanwhile she lived with Oannes in seeming happiness, and accompanied him and his band on those marches which they undertook into the cold and stony neighbourhood to chastise rebellious tribes or to subdue fresh ones. During this time, though

he tried his best to keep her in ignorance, she studied carefully his stratagems, the disposition of his tents of goatskin, the duties of sentinels and of discoverers who reported what lay ahead, the use of sling and arrow and lance, the various methods of attack and defence.

One day, having learnt all his war-tricks, she strangled the mighty Oannes with her own hand.

The Goddess had emerged.

Symira at once proclaimed herself his successor, and such was the fear she inspired by her deeds and merciless discipline that presently the whole countryside came to know her as their Ruler or Queen. This region being cut up into clefts and torrents and snowy mountains which came down to the very edge of the lake, with a poor soil, with rains that dripped ceaselessly from the clouds and a winter that ended only to begin again, she took a reasonable dislike to it and determined to find something more to her taste. She would raise a settlement elsewhere. Up flew the doves, following her once again.

Accompanied by a vast troop, not only of soldiers and captains, one or the other of whom was brought to her tent every night only to be sent away in disgrace next morning, but

also by three thousand woman-fighters or Amazons who, she thought, would soon find a healthy occupation in producing citizens for her new country, Symira moved southward, towards the Sun. Now they were wending down a streamlet which slowly widened out ; a month or two later, it had grown into a river. Mountains had melted far away, the soil was fruitful, and the Sun, although it was winter-time, gave out a pleasant warmth.

One evening three of her scouts announced that, unobserved themselves, they had seen a horde of men marching northward, up stream. A clash, they said, must come. Then the Queen took thought and laid a most cunning ambush for them, after the manner of Oannes. The others fell into the snare, and there began a slaughter which lasted the whole day ; those few who escaped killing were hunted into the water and drowned. Their leader, easily recognized and surrounded by half a hundred enemies, was brought bound before the Queen.

There he stood, radiant in defeat.

She surveyed him, and grew strangely agitated. Never had she seen his like among men. Never ! Her glance lingering on this or that part of his person, she felt, for the first

time in her life, a full wave of her mother's divinely feverish blood surging up within; it flooded her heart, bearing in its wake that more than earthly shyness which was wont to overcome the Fish-goddess, her immortal Parent, on occasions such as these. At sight of the prisoner's splendour of body and disdainful bearing she could find, from sheer trepidation of spirit, not a word to say. She was bewildered with love. Speechless and abashed, she stood confronting him.

Linus looked straight into her eyes, the wonderful black eyes now dim with trouble, and said:

'You have killed my followers and bound me with ropes and robbed me of every weapon save one. Would it please you to make trial of its mettle, O Queen?'

It was in a faltering voice that she said to her attendants:

'Bring the prisoner to my tent.'

Not long afterwards both Linus and Symira had realized to the full that neither could live without the other. That is why these two half-gods thenceforward stayed together as King and Queen, building lower downstream a city, the like of which had not yet been seen among men.

And it was worthy of note that Symira, shameless as she grew to be in later years, could never be induced, not even by the most depraved of her intimates—not even by Fattuta, her heart's friend—to tell the story of that first love-encounter with Linus. To the end of her long life, and for reasons of her own, the Queen remained girlishly bashful on this one subject. All she ever volunteered to say was that he was the only person who had ever taught her anything that was worth learning about such things.

Little she knew, then or afterwards, that Linus was her own father. And—strange are the ways of half-gods !—little would she have cared, had she known it.

STRANGER still are the ways of Immortals

The Goddess of Wisdom had not been mistaken. It was her turn to joke and laugh. A child had been born to herself and the Moon, which proved that the latter was not sterile, as some of them thought, but only shy; incredibly shy. The infant was a pert little man-god, far too clever for its age, knock-kneed and, though barely born, already grey-haired. Its father, just then shining down below, was mightily proud of his achievement. He had begun to give himself airs as never before; as to fits—he laughed at the notion. The very tone of his voice was altered. It had lost its squeak.

To celebrate this event, a huge banquet was held in the Celestial Halls; the Great Father himself having been induced to preside by way of an exception, since Menetha was one of his favourite daughters. Yet he remained aloof from the rest, sulky and indifferent to their merriment. And now the feast drew to its close; Hapso, that loathly fowl, sat in morose fashion on his branch, after gobbling

so inordinately that he threw up great mouthfuls from time to time. Many Immortals had already left their places to take pleasure on earth or in the Gardens of Bliss.

Others stayed on. They were listening to Derco who had considerably spoilt their fun with her complaints, and would have spoilt it still more, had the Earth-god, against whom she was raving, not been absent. Sometimes she seemed to quiet down and forget her griefs; then broke out more viciously than before, harping on her disgrace and the Clatterer's perverseness in bringing Linus to life again — Linus, who so thoroughly merited the fate she had devised for him. More than once she appealed to the Great Father: no answer was vouchsafed. And always the same old story! At last Menetha observed:

'Surely, dear Sister, this perseverance in trifles is unworthy of an Immortal. And it spoils our banquet as well.'

'If you, Menetha, had not been persevering with the young Moon, we should have had no banquet here at all.'

'The Moon, O Derco, is no trifle.'

'Try to think of something else, Derco darling,' suggested the Great Mother.

'Nothing else is worth thinking about, Mother dear.'

So the bickering went on. Then they heard a familiar and pleasant crash : the Earth-god had returned. He came from Aroudi, whom he was now tired of teasing and whom he decided to let loose again very shortly, just for fun ; a caprice which was to cost the toiling race of mortals dear. On his arrival, Derco's rage flared up again, and the strife between these two grew so noisy that the Great Father deigned to enquire what it was about. Each of them having stated his case, he said :

'Your accounts of the same event, my children, are shockingly at variance. We must learn the truth. Call up the Sun ! Where may he now be wandering ? '

Menetha, who knew a great deal, replied :

'He is not wandering anywhere, dear Parent. He is reposing in the Gardens of Bliss. It is night, on earth.'

The Sun, on learning why he had been summoned, appeared to be more embarrassed than ever before.

'Speak up, my boy,' said the Great Father sternly. 'Tell the truth, beware of blushing, and don't waste our time.'

'I obey, O Father. And yet, how difficult

is the task you have set me ! For what I saw was enough to make Hapso blush . . .' He paused a moment, and seemed to be making an effort to pull himself together. Then he took to relating in straightforward fashion that scene by the river-side and what Derco, in the shape of a horrid Worm, had done. 'This much I saw,' he went on. 'Whether, as she vows, the Clatterer brought that young mortal to life again, I cannot say. I saw nothing. Some stupid wander-cloud must have flittered in front of my eyes.'

'Always that wander-cloud,' said Derco, 'and always at a convenient moment !'

The Sun, who disliked quarrelling more than any of them, promptly began again :

'But I saw something else, Father, which would make none of us blush and which I think will interest you. The Hyperboreans seem to be tired of my unpunctual ways ; if so, no wonder. Be that as it may, they are building a new temple, such a temple as has seldom been seen on earth. What a temple !'

The Voice said grumpily :

'How these mortals shift their hearts about ! Another temple. To whom ?'

'To whom, dear Parent, save to yourself ?'

He had gained his point. The Great Father

took no further interest in Derco's concerns; it was as though he had never heard of them. At the Sun's announcement, his divine lineaments revealed themselves all roseate with satisfaction, and into those blue eyes came a look of ineffable wisdom and malice . . .

Presently Menetha turned to her sister:

'Now tell me, Derco, where did you learn this news, since our Sun saw nothing?'

'From the dear Wind,' she answered, 'who is not bothered by wander-clouds and therefore sees all the things which our Sun ought to see. What should we do without him?'

'I thought so,' said Menetha. 'No disturbance ever takes place here but the Wind and his gossip are to blame for it. He really ought to be bottled up again.'

'So he ought!' exclaimed the Clatterer. 'Where is he?'

'Now for the fun,' they all began. 'Catch him! Bottle him up! Roll him about! Where is he? Where is he? . . . Ah, there he is!'

And while some of them were pushing forward an old empty vat of Myût, the others captured the Wind and dragged him along amid a terrible scuffle, trying to push him head foremost into the vat.

'Bottle me up if you dare!' he screamed, kicking and struggling furiously. Then, all of a sudden, his eyes encountered those of Derco. They woke in her impulsive nature a strain of sympathy and affection. She remembered her promise to help him; she remembered how he talked in her cold cavern and cheered her with that good news about Eskion. She stepped in among them.

'Do leave him alone,' she begged. 'I renounce all my claims, and declare myself satisfied in every respect, if only our dear Wind be spared this indignity. Please leave him alone!'

They let him go, astonished at her words.

In that moment was sealed a bond of friendship, and more than friendship, between herself and the Wind whose effects, not long after, were both felt on earth and in the Celestial Halls. And now quiet seemed to be restored; yet the Earth-god remained discontented.

'I came here for fun,' he grumbled, 'and this is what I find! A clamorous and bloodthirsty fish, always spoiling our sport. You heard what the Sun reported, all of you? No grovelling mortal has yet behaved in such a foul fashion——'

'Hearken to the shameless Clatterer!' she

cried. 'He scatters his seed like thistle-down over the wide earth, and when I show a little kindness to one of these myriad wretches, I am driven out of my temple and made to wander homeless from land to land. And now he has fanned his soul into life again, and filled it with flesh and blood——'

'Who shall save us from this brawling, pestering nuisance? Do you eat a child, monster, because he has given you delight? Oh, go to Eskion . . ' and therewith himself sped earthwards, and was soon fondling the limbs of some slender woodland thing down there, on the Middle Heights, under the leafy maples.

The Sun, lover of peace and order, drew near to Derco, saying:

'Take his advice, my Sister; and take mine as well. Go to Eskion. I glanced over the place yesterday, and noted something which should give you pleasure.'

SHALL I go? she wondered. Shall I?

She was afraid of some terrible disappointment; afraid lest her brother should have uttered those comfortable words only in order to calm her. Then she recalled again what the Wind—ah, the dear Wind!—once told her to the same effect: how that Babramolok had returned from the Biluthians as her champion, and that men of Eskion were tired of the tricks of her successor, the deplorable old girl-hunter. Was it true?

Earthward she glinted and moved unseen among those well-remembered streets of Eskion.

It was a spring morning, a morning worthy of the visit of a Goddess. The sea lay there in smiling blue content; merry wavelets ran over those stretches of glittering black sand or lapped caressingly against the swart precipices further away; all the inland region was green with young crops. The town itself wore a festal air. Gaudy decorations hung from the houses and fluttered in the breeze; the thoroughfares were bestrewn with flowers. What did this mean? And where could all

the inhabitants be? Save for a few grey-beards and old women and tiny children, and the ever-busy life at the harbour, Eskion seemed to be deserted.

Soon she was bending her way elsewhere.

Visible from afar was that new temple which stood, beyond the precincts of the town, on a rocky platform overlooking the sea. It had been completed by Babramolok who returned long ago from those Biluthians richer than ever, and had now reared this dazzling structure at his own expense, refusing every kind of remuneration either for the wonderful materials or for the workmanship or for his services as builder. His last sack of gold had been spent on the enterprise. He was now quite a poor old man. None had ever been more beloved of the citizens.

Here she understood why the town was empty. The people had left their houses and were disporting themselves all about this sanctuary; crowds of them covered the meadow that sloped landwards from the brow of the cliff—a many-tinted throng, moving hither and thither under the bright sky of spring. Round the building itself had been set a grove of thymul trees with gently stirring foliage. She was glad; they were

her favourites—no other Immortal loved them ; they had been planted, therefore, on her account.

'How kind of these people,' she thought, 'to take me to their hearts again !'

Then she noticed something which made her even happier. There was no tank containing the Duri-fish of long ago. It had not been forgotten. At Babramolok's advice it was purposely omitted.

'How wise of them,' she thought, 'to understand the change in my nature !'

For Derco, as she had been, no longer existed. The capricious Maiden-period was over. The Fish-goddess, that vindictive and bloodthirsty Virgin, had melted into something else—into something milder, more indulgent ; a Mother-goddess full of Love and Joy.

Her new abode was silent and void within : not a priest, not a worshipper, to be seen. But how spacious, how fair, how different from the black-and-vermilion hovel of former days ! What a lovely dwelling for a Goddess ! In the innermost shrine she found, to her delight, that the golden brasier had been placed in its old position.

'Let them know their Protectress is among

them,' she thought, touching the wick with her divine finger. Straightway it ignited into the ruddy flame she knew so well.

And now a sound reached her from without, a sound of human voices and of droning instruments of music. She issued and took up her stand on the threshold, invisible to mortal eyes. A gay procession was winding up towards the temple entrance ; clusters of priests, of men and matrons and boys and girls, stepped forward singing her praises, and imploring her to return to Eskion and be their Protectress as in days gone by.

Last came, and all alone, Babramolok. He was unbelievably old. He had willed himself to live in order to see this day and declare the temple open, and had refused, to the amazement of all, to enter a litter or be supported by his friends in so solemn an hour. Leaning lightly on a staff he walked right up to the temple entrance, while priests and citizens grouped themselves about him. These men marvelled, as well they might, at his vigour of body. Some of them, moreover, detected a spell-bound look in his face, as though he were wrapped up in dreams of his own and unaware of what went on around him. No wonder. For, as the Wind was

caressing his white locks, he seemed to hear a Voice whispering persistently into his ear :

'Sh, sh, sh, should anybody be a virgin? Should anybody . . .'

He had prepared a beautiful speech for the occasion, recounting all the vicissitudes of the temple and its slow growth, hinting at his own humble efforts in favour of the Goddess and concluding with a fervent prayer that She might now see fit to return to Her worshippers and take up Her abode among them. This divine questioning drove it all out of his head.

'Sh, should anybody . . . ?'

The answer was obvious, in view of what had happened to the Goddess herself!

'Sh, sh, sh, should anybody be a virgin? Should anybody . . .'

Babramolok began to address the assembly with quiet conviction :

'Nobody should be a virgin. Nobody! Has not our Goddess shown the way? Once a Maiden. She is now tired of that sour state. Then follow Her example—you, the young ones ; take love with both hands. It is love, and love alone, that trims your lamp. Be quick to love and slow to die . . . All torment of mind, my children, is born of unfulfilled desire. Thus was our Protectress afflicted,

while yet a Maiden. Often we suffered under her caprices, since Her suffering was ours. Often She sent us frog-plagues and tempests, and heat and cold and legions of mice. Her torments are now at an end. Even so will yours be. Only tread in Her footsteps. Tread in Her footsteps! Let there be no virgins in the land . . And remember Babramolok, who gave all to Her. Say: he died poorer than the poorest, and older than the oldest. Say: he was father of seventy sons . . . Seventy thousand times, my children, does the Dragon slip his scaly hide; then creeps below. To him will Babramolok creep, ere a new dawn appears. Farewell to light of day, and sons of earth! But oh, that our Goddess would deign to give some sign of Her presence among us, so the old man might rest contented in his tomb . . .'

He ceased abruptly. There on the threshold, for the merest twinkling of an eye, the Goddess stood revealed before him in all Her radiance, graciously smiling. They carried him home in a swoon, a swoon of delight. A few of the priests likewise declared they had seen the vision, and even those of the people who still hesitated to believe could not but be convinced of its truth when they learnt that the sacred

wick on the brasier had been ignited by no mortal hand.

There was no doubt about it : the Immortal had installed Herself in Her new abode.

That night, accordingly, was celebrated an orgy of love such as had never yet been known at Eskion which thenceforward, and for ages to come, grew famous for its merry rites in honour of what was once a rancorous Fish-goddess. Everybody was happy ; none happier than Babramolok whose fate, indeed, was little short of miraculous. They said he received the highest favour which a Love-loving Protectress could have bestowed on her venerable champion or on any other mortal. A blissful end was his ! Lying motionless at home in that death-like state of trance, he gave no sign of life till midnight, when, springing to his feet and clapping hands with boyish glee, he called loudly for seven little virgins . . .

'Thanks, Divine One !' he exclaimed. 'And now, O my Mistress, be pleased to grant me the favour of rest.'

So saying, the enviable Babramolok fell asleep as softly as a child, and never woke again.

At the self-same hour of midnight another

prodigy took place in the innermost shrine of the temple. The flamelet over the golden brasier was observed to be violently agitated. What was the Wind doing there?

The priests—they smiled, they approved; they knew She had found an Immortal Companion worthy of Herself, and forgotten those earthly striplings whom once She loved.

ESKION flourished after the death of Babramolok, and grew to be richer even than the land of the Biluthians. Other countries, too, were famous in those days—none more so than that of the remote Colocynthians, soon to be overwhelmed with disaster. But the exploits of Linus and Symira surpassed them all by far, and men might well have grown grey in speculating by what means that immense city with its towers and hanging gardens, the roadways and canals, the summer pleasance of Vanna on the shores of that distant blue lake which required ten or twelve thousand workmen and six thousand master masons to build it, the other towns and villages, that sea of liquid gold, the fleet of barges—by what means all this splendour could have been conjured out of a desert, had they not known that the creators of it, both of them, were divinely tinctured; were half-gods and not mortals.

Fast friends, they vied with each other in fruitful ideas, and Symira was not long in astonishing her King with that project for a

'House of the Doves.' Those thousands of doves, silver-winged and rosy-footed, had accompanied the Queen's footsteps since the day of her birth. Now they fluttered disconsolately about the new-born city, trying to rear their young in whatever crannies and crevices they could find. It was a pitiful thing, she said, that these devoted and almost sacred fowls should be in such a plight, living here and there and everywhere instead of being housed all together in the fashion that was natural to them. A worthy home should be prepared!

'It is an inspiration,' said Linus, 'and a lovely one. I should never, never have thought of it myself.'

The vast building was full of chambers which the Queen had previously designed for a purpose that struck her as admirable. It lay on ground by the river-side, and the doves lost no time in taking possession of the countless turrets, honeycombed to suit their nesting habits, which crowned its roof. Within this structure was a spacious courtyard full of shade-giving trees, where the birds were wont to disport themselves and receive their food.

Now, since these doves were of a voluptuous race, and their love-tricks more lively and

delectable to behold than those of any others, Symira, who attached due importance to matters of Love, had long ago determined to put them to an instructive use for the good of her people. In the chambers, accordingly, were installed sixty-nine dancing girls, to be known as the ' Doves ' or the ' Pleasant Ones.' It was the duty of these mirthful and nimble-witted children to give lessons in practices of delight to those few of the boys who, aspiring to overcome some wretched native coyness and to learn what all men should learn, might be tempted by the engaging antics of the love-sick fowls in that courtyard to emulate their achievements. If so, here was a choice of willing partners for the first attempt !

The system worked well. The House of the Doves was frequented from the very day when Symira formally opened its gateway to a grateful and delighted crowd—frequented not only by bashful boys, but by young men who were not quite so bashful, and by older ones who claimed to be younger and bashfuller than they possibly could have been, and even by very old ones who, unable to find any other pretext, vowed they had forgotten what once they knew and were anxious, for the sake of their health, to learn it again. Although it

was against the rules of the place, they all, on one plea or another, contrived to gain admittance, since the ' Mistress of the Doves ' was far too kind-hearted to close the door on anything that called itself a man.

The Mistress of the Doves : such was her title. For it stands to reason that some trustworthy person was to be in charge of all these girls, and responsible for their good behaviour. And Symira, who could found a city and lead armies, had the born ruler's eye for small concerns as well as great. A proof of her unerring judgment in such things was that she selected the only woman whose rare natural talents fitted her to occupy so important and trying a position . . .

' It 's very kind of you, Madam, to think of putting me in this place, and I 'll do my best to look after the girls, though it 's not what I 've been accustomed to. I 've had enough to do, looking after myself ! But I 'll try to keep the little bitches in order, and I can't say more.'

Who was talking ?

Who but Fattuta, the good-natured and shameless Mistress of the Doves ?

Dame Fattuta always appeared in a single gaudy robe of her own invention, which could

be, and often was, slipped off her body by a mere shake of the shoulders. She was a noteworthy person, an indestructible old harlot, born of a hot and handsome family—the scum of the people—and bred in the streets ; one who knew the ways of the world and of men in particular.

Grey-haired now, and obese, Fattuta, despite her wonderful accomplishments, had never been of the mercenary kind. Even as a girl, she loved not in order to live ; she lived to love. Whatever she earned from earliest youth was promptly spent again on man-friends, or on little treats to her sister-harlots. Fattuta never wronged a fly, and nobody had ever seen her angry. Her flow of homely talk, the idiom of low quarters, which she took no pains to modify even in the Queen's presence, and her frank expressions of opinion, were a source of amusement to the half-divine Symira, reminding her of her own rough times of promiscuous love, soldier-love, following the death of Oannes and before her meeting with Linus. In quite important respects, too, Fattuta proved to be a jewel. She had a rare capacity for peace-making and for taking things as she found them ; 'no use making oneself ill over anything,' she would say ;

with a smile or some jocular word she adjusted all the little bickerings of the Doves and all their occasional quarrels with man-clients. Soon she had completely gained the Queen's confidence, and grown to be the only person beside Linus with whom Symira deigned to converse in familiar fashion.

They understood each other; they had tastes and memories in common. And, as time went by, they grew so intimate that under Fattuta's influence certain strains of earthliness slumbering deep down in Symira's bosom were awakened, or re-awakened—strains derived from her divine Mother who likewise confessed to a vein of coarseness in her nature. Had not the great Fish-goddess proved it by seeking out in olden days the humblest of young mortals, and taking joy in their companionship?

Symira reverted to these instincts of her soldier years and gratified them by visiting from time to time the House of the Doves, of which she was Patron and Founder, and there playing the part of a Pleasant One till a certain day when Fattuta, like herself, had an inspiration. If there was anything the Mistress of the Doves liked almost as well as lying in a man's arms, it was obliging her friends. Now,

she thought, she would be able to oblige two friends at the same time. She remarked to Symira on one of these occasions :

'Very proud, I 'm sure, to welcome you, Madam. And such a pleasure as well, if I may say so ! But I don't see why you need come here just for that. I 've a young cousin, now, and he 's thirty years younger than myself and the prettiest boy you ever set eyes on, with the same kind of blood in him that I have—if you know what I mean. And as strong as twenty of them——'

'What of it ? ' enquired Symira.

'Why not have a look at him ? Then, if you care for him, you may care for more of them. Why not have a kind of body-guard ? He 'd make a splendid Captain, and you could keep the whole band about you always, instead of coming here. The King wouldn't mind ! He was with one of my girls yesterday——'

'I know,' said Symira with a smile. 'He goes after women all the time, bless him. And fonder of me than ever ! '

Fattuta went on :

'What do you say to my notion, Madam ? '

'You are a sensible old Dove.'

Thus, at Fattuta's suggestion, was formed

that troop of ninety-nine warriors under the orders of her cousin, the elegant young Captain, to whom Symira had instantly taken a liking. Their duty consisted not so much in fighting enemies as in looking handsome and obeying the Queen's commands at any hour of the day or night.

Soon enough Linus, like Symira and like Fattuta, had an inspiration of his own. It came to him by night, and may well have been whispered into his dreams by that Divine Parent of his who was far too busy amusing himself, and fertilizing gods and mortals, to care for the adoration of worshippers, but who every now and then displayed a tiny streak of politeness in his dealings with Linus, his son.

This was the inspiration :

Why not raise a temple—a temple to the Great Father ?

When the matter was mentioned to Symira, she said :

' You have had many happy ideas, Linus. But this is certainly the happiest of all. What a wonder you are ! How did you ever come to think of it ? '

Hardly was the building commenced before the King's sagacity became manifest. The

blessings that now poured down upon his realm, already so prosperous, were past counting. It was the Immortal's way of showing appreciation of this structure, which stood erect in due course of time, the pride of its age.

The Great Father was well pleased with himself; so pleased that a change took place not only on earth but in the Celestial Halls as well. His sulkiness evaporated. He began to preside at banquets once more, and to grow sportive and jovial as in days gone by. The Wind declared he had recognized their Divine Parent scampering about the Middle Heights in various goatish disguises; certainly there sprang up at this time a glorious brood of god-children—none knew whence they came!

And once more he took to inventing, to the delight of gods and mortals, all kinds of things: new dishes for their banquets, and eagles mother-naked—that is, having no feathers on their bodies, and a ring round one of the wandering stars, and trees that gave birth to winged frogs, and islands with Holes in them, and a dance for the Moon's knock-kneed little Baby, and shells with fifty-two spirals, and a fountain of pink sea-water, and flowers

that looked like butterflies, and bearded women, and comets without tails, and a host of other charming but useless objects, out of sheer fun and exuberance of good spirits.

Something new every moment !

He was their Wonderful Parent, after all.

IT must have been another proof of the Great Father's benevolence that just then, after so many years of vain hopes, a child should be born to Linus and Symira. The little one was named Linyas ; he was frail but lovely, and never was infant more petted by its father. At every hour of the day the King would want to see it. To the horror of its nurses he would have it brought to him whether it was sleeping or waking—whether he was among his councillors, or in those gardens or ' paradises ' which he had laid out and filled with animals ; whether he was alone with Symira, or enjoying the society of those other women who loved the King and adored his child as if it were their own.

For now, as time went by, Linus began to indulge immoderately in that love of frolics which he had inherited from the Divine Parent. While Symira cherished her bodyguard, Linus cherished these fair women ; like intelligent half-gods, they wished each other joy of their amusements. And soon it was once more Symira's turn to have an inspiration. Her

intimate knowledge of man's structure, her solicitude for Linus and that astonishing eye for small things as well as great, suggested an invention which vastly pleased the King and was soon to be copied over the whole known world. She invented the sterile things called eunuchs.

'You are a marvel, my dearling!' cried Linus. 'That simple device—why did it never occur to me?'

He could now leave his women in charge of these creatures without any anxiety; undisturbed by fears on their behalf, he could give rein more freely than before to another of his favourite diversions, the chase. This ended in taking up so much of his time that Symira often feared for his safety, and playfully reproached him with neglecting the city and making the wilderness his home. Accompanied by a large retinue, with tents and hounds and horses and arms and food-supplies, he would depart, and sometimes stay away for twenty days in the wild country, netting stags or boars, pursuing the fleet mountain asses, spearing lions and other dangerous beasts.

One person never failed to be with him on these expeditions: the Court physician. Not

that Linus was liable to sickness of any kind. The reason was another one. This individual had been accidentally discovered to know so much of the habits of wild animals, and to have so rare a capacity for tracking them down, that the most experienced huntsmen could not vie with him. One would have said he was a kind of jungle-thing himself. A strange gift for the most renowned physician in the land to possess ! He was altogether a strange young man . . .

Symira's fears were justified.

There happened to Linus during one of these excursions an adventure which put an end to all of them—an appalling nocturnal experience of which he never spoke to any one, save only to her.

The tents had been pitched at a forest's edge after an unusually stifling and thunder-laden day ; a day marked, moreover, by ill-luck, one of the king's men having been clawed to pieces by a panther. Now night was once more waning away, and Linus, after tossing about restlessly during the hot hours of darkness, had at last, just before daybreak, fallen into a heavy sleep. Suddenly a pungent musky odour filled the tent. At the same moment he felt a pain, an agony of pain.

He was gripped round the throat by a band of iron. He was nailed to earth—choking! Impossible to breathe——

The Haunter of Outskirts, that wild one, was upon him.

He whispered roughly:

'So your father held me fast. Then the Empty God let me out again. For that civility you shall go free likewise. Few words, Linus, and fair dealing! Your home is the city. The wilderness is mine——'

Just when it seemed to Linus that his breast should burst, the pressure was relaxed, the demon gone. Gasping for breath, he crawled to the tent opening. An Outline, a shadowy Figure, caught his eye. Enormous it loomed, stalking up the hillside and melting into the grey mists of dawn.

Was it some dream-vision? It might have been nothing else but for the fact that, as morning came, the guards outside the King's tent were discovered to be dead, all six of them. They were not strangled or speared or poisoned. Their bodies had been crushed to pulp and flattened out of all human shape, as though some mountainous mass of rock had rolled itself over them. There they lay! The Court physician glanced at these poor remains with

a certain interest, but said nothing. Only on being pressed hard by some of them did he volunteer the information that it struck him as an uncommon form of accident. He was a reserved young man, who knew more than he cared to say.

Nor did he, for all his insight, profess to discover a cure for that mark, or band, of dusky red colour which thenceforward disfigured the King's neck. There was no remedy for it, he vowed ; and those woman-doctors, of whom Symira afterwards had not a few, were in their turn obliged, for the first and last time in their lives, to agree with him. There was no remedy ! The mark stayed on, to remind Linus of a certain encounter.

After this horrible occurrence, he abandoned the chase and devoted himself more than ever to the society of his women, to feasting and other city pleasures. He moved no further afield than to the Satyrs' hill, which lay a few leagues to the South. Here lived his old friends Nea-huni and Azdhubal in mellow companionship, talking over past times, happy to think that Linus was carrying on their lore and traditions, and congratulating themselves, in their demure fashion, on his earthly achievements which had surpassed all their hopes—

all the hopes, at least, of Nea-huni ; since the other remained contemptuously indifferent to mortals and their works.

They had begged Linus to seclude them, as far as possible, from the world. They were old and tired, they said ; they had not many more hundred years to live ; they were satisfied with each other's society. Linus met their wishes more than half-way. He caused the entire hill to be surrounded by a prodigiously stout enclosure at its foot. The place was to be consecrated territory, and the direst penalties were imposed upon any one who should venture to enter those precincts, which now became known as the ' Forbidden Hill.' Many out of sheer curiosity came and lingered at the fence, wondering what the Satyrs looked like and striving to catch a glimpse of the last survivors of that half-divine race which in days gone by had populated and beautified the whole earth. In vain. The Satyrs and their rosy dwelling were hidden from view by a screen of lofty trees, and mystery soon began to gather about the Forbidden Hill. It grew thicker as time rolled on.

Yet once a year Linus himself came to be their guest. He arrived always at the same season, namely, in the hot days of early

autumn, when grapes were ready to be plucked. So far as the common people could judge, this visit was a pompous and solemn affair. Borne slowly in a chariot at the head of a splendid procession, with glitter of arms and the clash of musical instruments, Linus reached the fence which, on that day alone, was formally broken through. Here, at the foot of the hill, the procession halted and camped and awaited his return, while Linus went up by himself bearing a bunch of flowers in his hand—a yearly gift to the venerable Satyrs. Once up there, all formality was cast aside. He was their child, their friend, and they welcomed and entertained him as such. He brought them fresh news of that world of mortals in which they—Nea-huni, at least—still took some interest; he hearkened to their serene talk and questioned them on this and that.

So passed a few happy days which, for Linus, were different from all the rest of the year.

Now the younger generation of men, the ignorant ones, often asked why Linus ascended the Hill, and why it was fenced round, and whether these so-called Satyrs really existed, and if so, what they were. And others were not wanting, older ones, who claimed to

know an answer to such questions. These men told dreadful tales about Nea-huni and Azdhubal. The Satyrs existed, they said, and Linus ascended their Hill once a year in accordance with some old and unknown arrangement. The Hill was Forbidden and fenced round, they said, because Linus loved his people. He sought to protect them from harm. Oh, yes ! The Satyrs existed.

What they were ?

Why, they were the last survivors of a brood of disgusting man-eaters who once infested the whole earth. They used to crunch up their visitors. They would still be crunching them up, had not Linus, with that tremendous fence of his, ringed the foul creatures round about.

THE serious work of government was now carried on almost exclusively by the energetic Symira, the King's maxim being this : Eat, drink and love ; the rest is not worth a snap of the fingers. He lived up to it. He indulged immoderately in all three of these pastimes, and the consequences, especially so far as Love was concerned, began to tell on him. He added to the numbers of his women instead of reducing them ; instead of diminishing his visits to their quarters, he increased them. Such was his inheritance from that lustful Parent ! He might have been the Earth-god himself in this respect ; he actually tried to rival those Divine achievements, and his mortal particles could not but feel the strain. Everybody noticed that his health, whatever the cause may have been, was not so good as formerly.

Maybe he never quite recovered from the shock of that nocturnal encounter with Aroudi. It still haunted his dreams and made him sleepless ; many a night, waking up all bathed in perspiration, he felt the demon's clutch

about his throat, and startled with a wild cry the three or four fair ones who slumbered at his side. It was remarked, too, that the half-divine gift which the Satyrs had so much admired, that gift of remembering everything —it began to desert him. More noticeable still was that he lost interest in the child Linyas whom he used to love so fondly. He no longer spent hours with him at play or in laughing rambles among those parks he had laid out; he never so much as enquired after him.

Linus was not his old self. He had become irritable and easily tired, he complained of headache, of a vague sense of trouble.

Now Symira should have consulted the Court physician who had a knack of never making a mistake and who would not have dreamt of expressing an opinion unless she asked him for it: such was his rule. But she disliked this ill-featured young man for his very efficiency, her secret idea being that she alone had the privilege of never making mistakes. She preferred to summon the garrulous Mistress of the Doves whose experience in matters of love was both extensive and curious, and whose low language invariably amused her.

'Very sorry to hear such a bad account, Madam. Overdoing things, I should say. No man of his age could get through with it, though I 've watched a good many of them trying their best to do so, and, believe me, it 's a sight worth seeing. You 'd laugh, Madam —you 'd laugh till you died ! It 's annoying, of course, to think you can still do what once you could and then find you can't ; very annoying. I wouldn't be a man over fifty for anything . . .' and she lost herself in reflections on the blessing of being a woman at that time of life.

'What 's to be done ? ' enquired the Queen.

Fattuta thought awhile.

'I might make him up a little powder,' she said.

'A powder ? '

'Well, Madam, it 's not the powder I generally give them, the powder, I mean, they always want me to give them. It 's another kind, it 's just the reverse, if you know what I mean. Most men wouldn't touch it for their lives, and I wouldn't either ! But I 've made it up more than once. Only the other day a young client of ours asked for six doses to give his wife. He 's in love with one of my girls, you understand, and his wife

—well, she won't let him have any rest. Pretty hard on the poor boy, don't you think? So I gave him six doses that would cool down the most flustery thing on earth.'

'You shall give me sixty of them.'

'Oh, the dear King! He'll never be himself again.'

Fattuta's powder was given a conscientious trial. It produced no effect whatever.

None the less, a few months later, the troubles of Linus vanished of their own accord, and far more suddenly than they had come. They were gone! He woke up one day elated in spirits, declaring he had never felt so well in his whole life. He was in a brilliant humour from that moment onwards.

Just then an important ceremony was to take place. There had arrived, for the first time, an embassy from the Colocynthians. It consisted of five of their cleverest and most fastidious old men, with a discreet retinue in their train. The strange appearance of the foreigners caused great astonishment, and staring but respectful crowds followed them hither and thither while they toddled with dignified steps, or moved in open litters, to view the sights of the town. More remarkable than their faces was their clothing; even

on the occasion of a memorable conference between the two of them.

That private interview never took place.

There was a public gathering, however, and most unluckily it had been preceded, contrary to Symira's advice, by a banquet at which the King displayed a tremendous capacity for drinking and an extravagantly buoyant humour ; all day long he had seemed to be bursting with some secret joy. Thereafter the ambassadors set forth the congratulatory aims of their visit and other solemn trivialities in terms whose urbane gravity was only equalled by their reasonableness, and only surpassed by their elegance. Linus replied in a short speech. His words fell like a thunderbolt on the assembly.

He was delighted, he said, to welcome such eminent men who had come from so far away. Delighted ! They had assuredly done well in paying their respects to one who was not only the greatest king on earth, but whose personal vigour and boundless intelligence proved him to be not so much a mortal as a god. As to strengthening the bonds of friendship between the two realms, a far better plan had just occurred to him. Why not build a bridge from one country to the other ? With the

means at his disposal, it would be the simplest thing in the world. The undertaking would be begun forthwith and finished in a few days. Meanwhile let them eat and drink and love ; he would send them away loaded with gold ; he would show them what he could do . . . and he ended in a fit of uproarious laughter.

IT was the fault of that miserable banquet. So thought all the listeners. Wine should be drunk after speeches, not before. The Colocynthian legates were mortified beyond words at this public reception which amounted, in their eyes, to a public mockery. But for instructions received, they would have packed up their priceless ambassadorial robes and departed the same hour. In obedience to those orders they stayed on.

Yet Linus never seemed to be sober enough to grant them the private audience for which they now began to crave with polite insistence. Time after time he put them off : it was most disheartening ! He gave them to understand that he was too busy with important schemes of his own to attend to their affairs just then. Always too busy, said he. Always too drunk, thought they.

The envoys were mistaken.

Linus was not so much drunk as engaged, day and night, in all kinds of projects, the matter of which he refused to reveal to any one. He had not a single moment to spare ;

fresh projects were conceived every minute, glorious projects, stupendous projects, which he laid aside or forgot as fast as he elaborated them. He was putting on a new character —restlessly enthusiastic.

And now, a whole month having gone by, the Colocynthians framed a vinegarish message of farewell and left the country, their mission unfulfilled, in a state of unimaginable disgust and resentment.

'The putrefied rat!' said one of them.

'Drunk for days and days on end!'

'His incivility is not to be matched on earth——'

'Save by his boastfulness——'

'And ignorance of our earth's configuration.'

'Ah,' they concluded in grumpy chorus, —'and ah! We always thought we were the Heavenly People, the oldest and best of mortals, unsurpassed for cleverness and good breeding. Now we know it. All the same, there is going to be trouble at headquarters over our report. Awkward questions are sure to be asked. The wording will have to be most carefully considered.'

What displeased Symira at this time was that Linus, from being open-handed, had developed into a positive spendthrift. With more than

regal prodigality he gave away his own robes and jewels, and sometimes, as though he did not know the difference, those of others as well; he ordered costly articles, hundreds of them, from the merchants; often, in cheery mood, he would call for a sack of gold and pour it down upon the common people. They called him a god, and no wonder. Never had he been so popular before, despite all he did for them in earlier days. The treasury, vast as it was, began to show signs of depletion.

'Be a god if it amuses you,' Symira told him more than once. 'But why do you waste the public money? And why give away my lovely jewels? I shall be vexed with you, for the first time in my life, if you go on doing it.'

To which he always replied in gleeful tones that deities could do as they pleased, and have as much gold and precious stones as ever they wanted. She would ask:

'What is the use of talking like that? Now just explain yourself, you dear old he.'

'Ah, you don't know, my pretty Queen; you don't know. But I do!'

'Poor Linus! I wish you would leave those wretched women alone. They are ruining you.'

And still there was no keeping him away from them. The consequence was that he slept worse than ever, his very speech grew faulty and hesitating and his gait unsteady, like that of an old, old man. Symira convinced herself that this over-indulgence must end. What could be done? Good advice had proved unavailing; pills had proved unavailing. There was nothing for it but to summon, much against her inclination, the Court physician.

This was a singular young man, lonesome in habits, ill-favoured and squat—like an ape or a toad, of complexion swarthy, almost black. He lived by himself, without friend or family; he spoke so little that he seemed to be grudging his fellow-creatures the sound of his voice. Unsociable by nature, he shared neither their pleasures nor their griefs. He was coldly indifferent to all the pursuits that absorbed them, and if on occasion he saved them from death by his knowledge, it was not because he was bent on keeping something alive; he was bent, rather, on killing something—on killing a disease. To this, his sole amusement, he brought a boundless and tireless ardour.

An inhuman creature! Nothing was known

of his birth, nor has his name been handed down to posterity. With hairy limbs wrapped in the skin of a sheep he arrived one day from the South, took to wearing clothes like other people, and then and there imposed himself by sheer superiority of attainments. It was acknowledged that nobody could approach him in the craft of healing. To account for this, they said he was the son of a jungle-witch, and something of that kind he must have been. He must have been ! What ordinary mortal could have come by those rare endowments, that ferocious independence and passion for solitude, that temperament of ice ? What mortal not forest-born could ever have pretended to his knowledge of the beasts of the wilderness ? The son of a witch, without a doubt . . .

He was called to see Linus.

When the examination was over he informed Symira in a scandalously short sentence that, women or no women, the King's disorder was incurable.

'Nonsense, man. Everything is curable except stupidity.'

The physician remembered one or two other exceptions, but, to save words, he merely observed :

'Let us call it, then, a case of stupidity.'

This made her angrier than before. She kept herself well in hand, as she always did, and remarked calmly :

'I think, before doing anything else, I shall call a consultation of my woman-doctors and see whether their opinion coincides with yours. What do you say to this ? '

He considered it a most proper proceeding, in view of the issues involved.

Theirs was a different view of the case, and a hopeful one. They inclined, all of them, to Fattuta's diagnosis that Linus had been overtaxing his powers for some time past and was now paying the natural penalty. A few months' stay in one of his cool summer retreats among the mountains, coupled with very spare diet and complete separation from the pernicious society of his women, would bring about the desired cure. Symira agreed with them.

Thither, accordingly, Linus with his suite and female physicians was conveyed by river on a fleet of nine boats which bore, among other cargo, a troop of dancing boys, the prettiest that could be found, to beguile his solitude and turn his thoughts into new channels. This bright inspiration came from

one of the physicians, an oldish and unusually broad-minded woman, devoted to the King, who insisted that everything should be tried in order to get poor Linus well again.

Arrived in that lonely spot, amid dripping fir-woods and the rush of waters, Linus, instead of improving, became deeply distressed in mind. The seclusion, the wildness, preyed upon him. He worried himself into a black melancholy. Nothing went as he wished. He complained of being starved ; the boys and their antics made him sick. 'Give me something to eat and remove those abortions, every one of them!' he commanded. The physicians gave him the wing of a lark, and that merry troop of dancers was sent down stream again. His nights were dreadful. He would shuffle up and down his chamber, talking to himself, crying for his women, and sometimes breaking into peals of hideously exultant laughter that scared his attendants out of their senses.

He returned a wreck.

There was often a look of unspeakable sadness in his features, often of meaningless joy ; he could hardly talk save in fragmentary snatches, and hardly walk save in a shambling fashion. Palsied but inflamed with lust, he

tottered to his women and only forsook them to let himself be surrounded, out of sheer weakness of spirit, by coarse, unscrupulous persons who gained his confidence with flatteries and made him waste the revenues for their own ends. This habit gave Symira the most serious concern—serious because the people, like himself, were more than ever convinced that he was a god and more than ever ready to do his bidding; so madly devoted, in fact, that any attempt to limit his freedom of action would have endangered her own position.

She decided not long afterwards that the time had come for a bold step. The dear King was useless to his realm and worse than useless; the national resources were running dry. After deep and anxious thought she hit upon a certain plan which commended itself, based, as it was, on his own favourite delusion.

'You are a god, Linus. I know it; everybody knows it. I suppose you know it yourself?'

He agreed, nodding his head. And he went on nodding it for long, in a dazed and mechanical fashion, as though he had forgotten to stop.

'You are a god. Now think! What are you doing here, on earth? Why not rejoin your Immortal Companions for a while? It is long since you saw them, and they are yearning to welcome you again.'

The words penetrated to his understanding; his lips began to move, trying to find some utterance. At last it came, in a querulous and quavering tone.

'I know . . . I know it. How—how to get up there?'

'In flames.'

With wily phrases she outlined her plan, speaking slowly, since his very wits had become impaired. As she proceeded, a look of surprise and gladness came over his perplexed features.

'Wonderful!' he cried.

IT was warm weather ; a cloudless summer noon.

Aided by the chief eunuch, he stepped out of the litter and looked about him, sleepily bewildered ; perhaps those women, who loved him and feared for him, had mixed a drowsy something with his food. He was clad in white. Before him stood the pyre, that miracle of construction ; it towered above the plain, and an unnumbered multitude swarmed at its foot.

Two youths of simple life had been invested with the honour of supporting his feeble footsteps aloft, and sharing his happy fate. Presently the three began to mount, halting at intervals on the stairway while he turned to confront with a flabby smile the thousands down below. These city folk were no less cheerful than himself. They knew that here was no farewell rite ; it was his pleasure to give them the spectacle of his ascension ; he would return in due course to rule over them once more.

At last the topmost platform was reached.

There they stood, all three ! Another instant, and nothing more was seen of them. So drenched with oil was the structure that it flared up instantaneously from top to bottom ; none could tell where the blaze broke out. With a sound like rushing wind, a pyramid of flame leapt into the blue sky. The onlookers seared by the sudden heat, fell back in terror, trampling each other under foot.

No pyre, great or small, ever burnt itself to ashes with such exceeding speed and fierceness

MANY of the spectators at that final scene vowed they had detected his divine figure soaring skywards out of the flame.

'He departed, as he came, a god!' So they spoke among themselves, and every one lamented his absence from earth; every one save only Symira, who therewith began to experience an unaccountable sense of relief. She had grown so accustomed to his presence that she never discovered, till that moment, to what an extent he had been in her way. Notwithstanding all his follies and extravagances he still exercised, by the mere fact of being alive, a dumb, restraining influence over his Queen, so far as her public acts were concerned. Now she realized how irksome that influence had been. He was gone! She would do as she pleased.

What of Linyas?

The child lived apart from his mother, fair to behold but not over-strong, in luxurious chambers which she had assigned to him far away from her own. No enviable existence was his. Since the illness and death of his

father, for whom he often asked, and always in vain—since that event, few pleasures had fallen to his lot. He was dressed in girlish clothes and rarely allowed to issue into the open air; he knew nothing of what went on in the world. Hidden away in that perfumed twilight and surrounded by a suite of women and such as they, he passed a wistful boyhood among glittering jewels and ambiguous talk and the rustle of feminine garments, his limbs untrained, his wits unawakened, his beauty unseen of men, like some flower that blooms only for those who dream.

Everything in his life was artificial and perverse.

The Court physician, who attended to his occasional illnesses, was not blind to this state of affairs and might have alleviated his condition by proposing healthy pastimes out of doors with two or three chosen companions of his own age. Not he! It was a rule of that wolfish being never to offer suggestions or to give opinions unless asked for them. And who could expect human sympathy from the offspring of a witch? Sufficient for him to exercise those chill but potent faculties. That done, he looked about for something

else, some new diversions, some new disease to study and circumvent.

This treatment of her son was part of a way of thinking which had become a second nature with the Queen. It was a symptom of her contempt and hatred of men Once convinced of its propriety, she lost no time in erecting this conviction into a system, and this system was handed down from her own far-off days into those of the Medes and Lydians and other ancient races. Symira carried it to grievous lengths. The world was to be ruled by women ; she alone would play the part of man. Her male councillors and attendants were gradually supplanted by the other sex ; those of them who kept their appointments were enjoined to wear long and sumptuous robes, and wigs, and ear-rings and other golden ornaments ; they were to shave themselves, to bedaub their faces with paint and to pass their time, when not occupied with business of the state, in the women's apartments doing embroidery and needlework.

They obeyed, bending like eunuchs over their grotesque labours, while Symira grew more mannish every day, not only in conduct but in other points as well : even in appearance. Her face and limbs waxed hairy and

her muscles tough as those of a professional fighter ; her voice became deep and harsh, her features stern.

And everything, within and without the realm, went as she wished it to go.

An unpropitious change set in when her contempt of men gave place to a loathing for them ; when she could not bear to see them around her any more. As might have been expected, the royal guard were the first to feel this alteration. The functions of that choice body were at an end, since she spoke of them with scorn and would have nothing to do with any of them. They were cast aside as useless for the purpose for which they had originally been gathered together. To belong to the guards was now an undignified kind of sinecure, and while some of them grumbled at this turn of events, others amused themselves by making coarse jokes about the Queen's new habits. All too soon, through a distortion of her divine mother's fiery passions, she began to develop leanings as ardent as they were outrageous—leanings which horrified her intimate friend the Mistress of the Doves whose tastes, though comprehensive, had always remained unsophisticated.

In those days Fattuta was often heard to

lament that it was hard work trying to keep the Queen 'straight,' as she called it. For Symira exhausted every vein of lust save that which seemed reasonable and legitimate; she was growing monstrous, and strange it was that an old harlot like Fattuta should be the only person who by sheer frankness, and inborn good nature, could still moderate the Queen's shamelessness in matters of this kind.

Even Fattuta's influence lasted not for long. Men began to tell each other unpleasant tales about the Queen, to the increasing harassment of the Mistress of the Doves, who had known Symira's propensities in earlier days and heartily approved of them. On one occasion she plucked up courage enough to remonstrate with her on the subject of a certain of these outlandish indulgences.

'You 've the whole world to choose from, Madam, and I wish I had! What 's to hinder you from taking any one you please? Those poor guards, now . . . I was talking only yesterday to my cousin the Captain, and he tells me they are terribly hurt about it. What have they done to displease you? And this last thing—well, it upsets me more than I can say. I declare I should get grey hairs

over the business, if I hadn't got them already. I don't understand it in the least. It scares me ; it really does, Madam. It scares me to death. Now speaking as one woman to another——'

'You dear old fool !' said Symira.

The Mistress of the Doves could think of nothing to say just then. At last she ventured, despondingly :

'I 'm only trying to keep you straight, Madam. There 's a young goldsmith, now, who comes to see my girls pretty often, and you never saw such a lovely figure, and a mouth to go crazy about, and——'

'Keep him, Fattuta. I shouldn't know what to do with him.'

'Oh, pardon me ! I think you would, Madam. I 've seen you at the Doves' House.'

'You will never see me again,' said Symira gravely. 'A young goldsmith : what next ? Tell him to drown himself, and don't talk to me ever again about these creatures. I have other quails to roast.'

'As bad as that ? And can't anything be done about it ? That hairy baboon, that miscarriage of a witch—he might know of a cure. Couldn't you consult him ? '

'I could, if I were ill. But I am not ill,

you poor ignorant Dove. If you only knew how well I was ! '

' This is terrible, terrible. You used not to talk like that. Oh, Madam, it makes me feel like crying . . .'

Strangest of all was that during this time, when the whole world seemed to be ruled by one depraved woman, the greatest of her achievements were planned and executed. Never had Symira displayed more brilliantly those more than human talents for administration. She gathered strength from resistance ; she went forward with her ideas, bearing down every kind of opposition.

New towns and palaces sprang up in the mountains ; the remotest regions were linked together by a chain of roads and bridges ; money poured into the treasury ; the city grew to nearly twice its former size ; fleets and armies became more efficient than ever ; the remaining barren tracts were made to blossom by means of a complicated system of sluices and dams, the ruins of which still bear her name. Luck, too, was on her side. The Colocynthians, for some reason or other, had given her cause for annoyance. To invade the territory of so immense a nation was a task at which she might well have

recoiled ; yet preparations were begun, and troops were on the point of setting out by land and water, when she received news that these crafty people were even then being humbled to the dust by a band of resolute fighters pouring in upon them from the North.

Everything went as she wished !

One of her undertakings was to cause a colossal block of stone, a single piece, to be hewn out of the rocks near her summer residence of Vanna. The monument, when cut into shape, measured 130 feet in length and 25 feet square at the base. It was hauled over the mountains by teams of oxen along specially constructed tracks, and then conveyed down stream on rafts which, mighty as they were, could never have supported its weight, had they not been buoyed up by thousands of inflated skins. After a journey of two years, they dragged it ashore on rollers and made a place for it near the corn market.

There, in what is now a desert waste, the obelisk stands to this hour, memorial of her greatness.

IT was just when the opulence and prosperity of Symira's realm seemed to know no bounds that the Great Father himself, most unfortunately, happened to glance down. He took note of what he saw and straightway lost his temper to such an extent that, without thinking what he was doing, he created, out of the superfluity of his own divine resentment, a certain dust or powder—a dire concoction which, at a wave of his hand, fell earthwards in showers of poisonous dew, tainting the air and confounding the wits of mortals. It was a blight ; it blighted their spirits. It was an infection ; it infected them with preposterous ideas concerning good and evil which had hitherto been no business of theirs, and with a passion for quarrelling about them.

None can tell whether he acted thus out of envy at the successes of a mere mortal—even as, long ago, he struck down the gentle race of Satyrs for a similar reason ; whether he was annoyed at the Queen's ill-treatment of Linus who had reared such a lovely temple in his honour, or at her endeavour to womanize

the whole world which was enough to annoy any man-god, or at certain recently developed and deplorable tastes of hers. None can tell ! Without a doubt it was one of his cleverest and most atrocious inventions, more than doubly atrocious since, for the fault of a single one, he punished not two but everybody. Such are the ways of Immortals.

The first of those who took the contagion were at a loss to know what ailed them. They lay on their couches and groaned. As the symptoms, however, never varied by a hair, it soon became recognized as a new distemper —a distemper lasting neither more nor less than nine days, and for which no remedy could be found. The stricken creatures complained of headache and feverish heat in all their limbs ; then followed that peculiar feature : a restless twitching of the nostrils as though, all unconsciously, they sniffed up the Great Father's germs that floated in the air round about them ; then convulsive movements, terrifying visions, and a period of incoherent speech ; then lethargy. On the ninth day they rose up completely cured, as it seemed. They were not cured. Their mind, retaining the infection, had undergone a subtle change and lost its sanity. They

saw everything with new eyes. They called themselves good, and forthwith began to act in accordance with frantic notions engendered by the disease.

It was observed, firstly, that some were exempt from this plague and never caught it ; secondly, that a few of the sufferers, very few, shook off the effects and learnt to laugh at their infatuation ; thirdly and chiefly, that in proportion as the sickness endured and spread further and further into the ends of the earth, its virus was attenuated. Pains and other distressing symptoms became weaker and finally vanished altogether ; the patient no longer felt any bodily discomfort, he merely felt good, and was indignant when others did not feel the same. This happened much later.

Meanwhile men, instead of attending to their affairs as heretofore, began to grow distracted. They began to brood sadly alone, or to debate in dismal companies, as to what was good and what was evil, and how it came to be such, and why, and what was now to be done. They argued, and never ceased arguing, about the welfare of their spirits, as though it were something quite apart from the welfare of their bodies—nothing else, apparently, was

worth thinking or talking about. Haggling and contradicting each other, and even exchanging vicious blows over the business, yet arriving at no conclusion whatever, they soon made life unendurable for those that remained impervious to the infection.

So it came about that a new race of mortals formed itself: clear-headed ones who yearned to live apart from the contamination of this thick-clustering brood of madmen which the Great Father's invention had called into being. They spoke of themselves as dreamers. Men of this kind loved to think of other times and other places. They looked forward, striving to build up in fancy some mode of existence more reasonable than that which went on around them; they looked backward into the days when the earth was full of tranquillity, when Satyrs, sprinkled over the land in amicable groups, made it by their wisdom a peaceful and a pleasant abode. Often they consoled themselves by wandering to the foot of the Forbidden Hill, and glancing up to where those two last representatives of an illustrious race, immune to the contagion, were even then gravely commenting on the fresh affliction which had befallen mortals; often, again, they turned their eyes with passionate longing

northward, into mountain masses that pierced the clouds—or southward, far away, into a blue haze of trackless wildernesses . . .

Was he there? Would he come to their aid? Would he wipe out the infection? Would he clear away this reek of fretful fellow-creatures?

He was there, the Haunter of Outskirts, foe to toilers and quarrellers and friend to solitaries like these; he hung about warily, taking his fiend-like pleasure in the visitation. For already men's minds were diverted from things of the earth. The rotted ones found no time to till or sow the soil—they must first puzzle out what is good; they must wrangle about evil, and why it is evil and not good. Already the canals, congested and full of weeds, flowed with abated current or broadened into dreary swamps; already torrents, ill-contained, ravaged the lower regions with cataracts, while crops were languishing and streaks of golden sand started forth insidiously to invade the cultivated green fields.

The dreamers marked these things with joy. They fathomed the designs of Aroudi, that sleepless and purposeful demon, their only hope. They discerned his handiwork. And there he was, hovering at the edges and waiting for his chance, which duly came, to

profit by the folly of human kind, obliterate their noisome vestiges, and gladden the hearts of his lonely lovers.

Soon enough he had charmed it all into the desert, the dear desert, of long ago.

MEANWHILE the malady raged, to the despair of the wiser among mortals, the confusion and torment of all. Men lost their capacity for joy; they forgot how blithely they used to live. In the place of that, they learnt something new. They learnt what was meant by Fear, and at once fell slaves to it.

Nobody was safe, for now began the reign of those pestilential prophets and law-givers who fattened on this Fear, and have fattened on it ever since. These men, taking their hint from the Great Father's methods and improving on them, took to splitting up good and evil into endless different categories; unlike the earlier squabblers, they did arrive at conclusions—that is to say, they settled affairs to their own contentment, and, having proclaimed ten thousand rules as to what is good and what is evil, and why, harassed with choice tortures both the slow-witted who failed, and the quick-witted who refused, to recognize their fatuous distinctions.

All delight fled from earth, and mortals, for the most part, grew to be the fools and cowards they have since remained.

AN alarming thing had occurred long before this. The Queen herself took the distemper. Half divine and prone to excesses as she was, she took it in an aggravated form.

Symira, who never in her life had known what it was to feel unwell, suddenly complained of sharp pains in her temples and waves of heat coursing down her limbs. Then began the ominous quivering motion of the nostrils. They summoned the Court physician, that inhuman creature whose duties in the kingly family had of late been confined to treating certain little ailments of Linyas and who, from personal experience, knew nothing of the Queen's constitution : she had never required his services !

He happened to know something else He knew that she had not forgiven him for being right about the fatal illness of Linus ; he also knew that just before her present seizure she was on the point of relieving him of his lucrative and well-deserved charge in favour of some particularly clever woman-leech whom she had discovered.

Being unlike the rest of them, being beyond the range of mortal passions, he just marvelled at her lack of common sense, and speculated as to its treatment. He bore her no ill will, and the idea, the human idea, of nursing a grudge, never entered his head. So one-sided was this individual and wrapped up in his own pursuit, that, had he felt for mankind a passing spasm of ill will or good will, of love or disdain or any suchlike failing, he would have wondered what was wrong with him. He would have diagnosed the disorder and cast about for a counter-poison. For the rest, any child by this time could have recognized those symptoms, so familiar were they to all. It was a sharp attack of goodness, the prevailing epidemic. Goodness must run its course, seeing that nothing had yet suggested itself in the way of an antidote. He therefore prescribed the usual variety of sedatives and even added, in view of the invalid's exalted position, a few unusual ones : what more could be done ? Then he withdrew solemnly, promising to return at sundown in order to convince himself that the medicaments were working as they should.

He never returned at sundown or at any other time. He went straight home, packed

up his belongings in haste, and, chartering a boat, sped down stream all by himself to rejoin his elfish parent in some hot and dank forest where she lived. Nobody saw him again. That shows his sense ! they said afterwards. Not for nothing had he studied the frailties of mortals. Not for nothing was he the son of a jungle-witch. Taking into consideration what he knew from hearsay and from his own relations with the Queen and, more particularly, what his patient Linyas in thoughtless hints had revealed as to her character, he surmised that her attack of goodness was likely to be the beginning of the end of everything.

He was right. And it stands to reason that this graceless but gifted person had, as a matter of fact, already hit upon the true remedy for the complaint, though his attempts to popularize it met with so little encouragement that he soon preferred to let things drift as they pleased. To thwart a disease was his joy, and he found means to thwart this one What cared he, if mortals were too muddle-headed to adopt them ? His proposed treatment was simple : castration or its equivalent for everybody who contracted the sickness. Thus and thus only, he thought, could the ever-spreading trouble be circumscribed and

finally eradicated ; the susceptible individuals leaving no issue to inherit their taint, while a sounder stock, impervious to the Great Father's goodness-germ, survived to carry on the traditions of more reasonable ages. This great medical discovery, destined to quicken and purify human nature, and to render earthly existence more pleasurable than it is, has not yet been given the fair trial it deserves.

Meanwhile Symira's illness, severe as it was, gave rise to no complications. Disquieting visions and fears of impending disaster were followed by a period of wild, rambling eloquence ; after that came a lethargy like death. When, on the ninth day, the Queen revived, it was as if she had never been ill at all. She slipped unaided from her couch, took a little food, and announced to her intimates that she had never felt more robust and clear-headed in her life. To all appearances the cure was complete. She was not cured On the contrary, she herself perceived that her being had undergone some change, and, while most of the sufferers talked freely about their new sensations, saying how good they felt and how good they were going to make others feel, Symira kept her own counsel, and acted.

Then happened a prodigy It was observed

on the day of the Queen's recovery that the multitudinous doves rose up skyward from their House like an immense pearly cloud, which they had never been seen to do before. All eyes were turned on the spectacle. Such were their numbers that a shadow fell over this quarter of the town ; it was screened from the sunny rays of morning. Then, after wheeling and whirling regretfully about the place, as though loth to depart, the winged thousands dashed with one accord into the cold and craggy mountains of the North, their ancient home. Not one of them remained behind, nor did one of them return to the House. Most of the citizens were sorry to see them go ; the sixty-nine Pleasant Ones within that building were terrified at this event, and wondered what would happen next. They were soon to find out.

Symira's attention was drawn in the first place to Linyas, that tender and dazzling youth, divinely tinctured like herself and not yet twenty years of age, with whom, nevertheless, she seldom held any communication, secluded as he was, by her commands, in distant apartments of his own. Although too proud or too wise to display it, she had lately felt towards this tangible record of her sub-

jection to Linus a dull dislike, but nothing more. He was too insignificant to be feared ; she only regretted he was not a girl. Now, in consequence of her attack, she saw him with new eyes. She was suddenly and firmly convinced that the lovely boy's life had not been without reproach. Strange, she thought, that she should not have known it earlier ! By way of frustrating any future lapses on his part, she determined to make a eunuch of him without loss of time ; it had been a favourite system of hers long before this illness. Then she changed her mind ; she realized he was a eunuch already to all intents and purposes. She sent for him.

A rare occurrence it was for Linyas to be summoned in this manner. After a little while the curtains were drawn aside ; he entered and, saluting his mother, moved forwards but encountered so grim a glance that he hesitated once more. He was timid ; he stood still. Symira divined his feelings and said encouragingly :

' Come to me, child.'

Linyas might have arrived from another world : such was his unearthly grace. Now he took heart and drew nearer with dainty steps, walking on tiptoe, arms crossed over his

breast, head inclined to one side, a smile on his painted lips, eyes that shone like stars. With affected simplicity, he wore not a single jewel. There was a patch of rouge on each of his pale cheeks, his curly brown hair had been supplanted by a crocus-hued wig that fell in ringlets over his shoulders, and the whole of his fair person was shrouded in trailing robes of a silvery texture. Drawing them chastely about him, the ethereal creature sat down at her side.

Symira went straight to the point. After a few explanations she advised him to catch the prevailing complaint, and to catch it quickly, as he valued his life. It was rather a long speech; this, however, formed the substance of her motherly remarks.

'I 'll try,' he said, in that endearing voice of his.

'You had better succeed, my boy.'

A few days later she received a message from him to the effect that, like a dutiful son, he had succeeded.

The same with her councillors, female and male. Those who remained uninfected, were recommended to lose no time in taking the germ. They took it.

Whole-hearted and disposed to excess in

all her actions, she was soon overdoing her new part. The many eunuchs, former instruments of the regrettable lusts of Linus, were still alive for the most part ; they might have been quietly disbanded and left to perish as they pleased. Marvelling how she had come to overlook them for so long, Symira had the old people done to death, every one of them, on a field outside the city walls, which was afterwards known as the Field of Pain.

Next came what she feared would be a delicate and an arduous task. There was sure to be some opposition, she thought, on the part of her heart's friend, the pleasure-loving Fattuta. The Mistress of the Doves, with those ingrained habits of hers, could not but object to contracting a disease of this nature. Far from it. There was no opposition whatever. Fattuta's convictions were shallow, but, in her shallow way, she was devoted to Symira to whom she owed everything ; the old dame, moreover, was always fond of new excitements, and always glad to oblige anybody

'Queer that you should mention it just now, Madam. Very queer ! I 've been feeling out of sorts for the last day or two ; bad head-aches and stomach-aches and other kinds

of aches as well ; I must have caught a touch of it already. And the rest of them shall catch it too, or out they go ! What do you say to calling us the Sixty-Nine Good Ones in future?'

In her heart she thought : 'Well, well ! No use making oneself ill over it. We girls need a change now and then, and at my time of life it 's as easy to be good as slipping into another dress. Besides, this attack of hers won't last ; it 's not in her nature.'

There was an end of the Doves' House.

And now arrived the turn of the Queen's guards, that carefully selected troop of ninety-nine who had once been so high in her estimation and had ministered so often and so successfully to her wants ; had been chosen, in fact, for that very purpose, though sadly neglected of late. Symira was tormented at the mere notion of their being still alive. She wondered what measures could be harsh enough for them, especially as only twenty-three had yet caught the complaint, their handsome Captain being not among that number. It was this warrior's cousin, Fattuta, who interceded with the Queen on behalf of the whole band, and maybe saved their lives. She said :

'Trust me, Madam, they are sure to be ill

sooner or later. Everybody's catching it. My girls are all laid up. Give them a little more time, for my sake!'

Fattuta was not mistaken. A few days afterwards a public announcement was issued to the effect that the remaining guards, inclusive of the Captain, had sickened.

So things went on. The Queen's looks had begun to change; she wore a hard and harassed air. Her habits of life were now austere; gold and rich robes and other pomps—they had long since been cast aside. Men no longer whispered unpleasant things to each other. There was nothing to whisper about, save that the city had become an amazingly dull place since Symira's attack. No amusements of any kind! Everybody's temper soured!

The gloom of goodness settled upon it in so black a cloud that troops of the younger men and women, and not a few rakish oldsters as well, undertook the long journey to Eskion, where, under the rule of an indulgent Goddess, they hoped to find, and actually did find, what was denied them at home: love and laughter to their heart's content. Those who remained behind were not long in realizing what might be in store for them if they failed to take the infection, and while some continued to take

it of their own accord, a certain number of others felt themselves unequal to the task of taking it even at Symira's orders. Those folk fled away, and formed among the hills a band of outlaws which was soon giving a great deal of trouble. A sense of insecurity began to creep over the country ; trade declined, field-work was abandoned.

Some years went by during which Symira, who gave herself no rest by day or night, had aged perceptibly ; her eyes alone were as lustrous as ever. At last, extenuated in health and full of a kind of despair at the little she claimed to have been able to accomplish, she took a resolve which has since been taken by others in her position. She would retire from the cares of a realm for which she felt nothing but contempt, and leave it to be ruled by Linyas and his friends and advisers, or by anybody else who cared to undertake so ungrateful a task. She was old. She was tired of men and their ways, tired of power, tired, almost, of life.

She looked around for some refuge.

That former House of the Doves, where now the Sixty-Nine Good Ones lived repenting of their merriment : what place of seclusion could be more appropriate ?

THITHER went Symira, turning her back on the world for ever.

In a bleak chamber which looked down upon the river bearing the city's garbage southward on its noisome eddies she discovered, to her own surprise, a new interest in life. Aided by Fattuta, she began to administer the affairs of the place with all the requisite shrewdness and somewhat more than the requisite severity. Even as the silver-winged and rosy-footed doves had once been her darlings, so now this band of decrepit harlots became the apple of her eye.

Fattuta's methods, she soon observed, had been too lenient. There must be an end of this indulgence. She made new and humiliating rules. The diet of the inmates grew to be scanty and monotonous and poor in quality —always the same, and never enough of it ; she dressed them in squalid and ridiculous clothes resembling sacks ; all finery and jewels, cherished in memory of past times, were relentlessly cast into the river. They themselves were never allowed to issue out of the

walls of the building. Their only exercise was a doleful perambulation of that large and shady courtyard which not long ago had witnessed so many perambulations of a merrier kind. Even laughter and loud talk were forbidden. Those who disobeyed the rules were locked up in dark chambers or deprived of their food.

These were such real hardships that, while all of them grumbled, not a few of the weaker ones actually succumbed. They were replaced by others collected about the lowest quarters of the town, in order that their traditional number might remain unchanged.

Three more years passed while the realm went slowly to ruin, while the Queen grew feebler and yet sterner, and her New Doves, as she liked to call them, yet moodier and older. Even Fattuta, though she conformed to the rules most rigorously out of love for Symira, was chafing under this irksome state of affairs. Always hopeful and disposed to see the bright side of things, she consoled herself with reflecting that 'it won't last.' Fattuta was mistaken. It lasted. The Queen never recovered from that first attack of goodness.

And now, worn to a shadow of her former person, shrivelled and peaked and acid, with

hair as white as snow, she took to her couch, and never rose again. From that couch she used to give directions to Fattuta, who came frequently to report how things were going on. Another year went by. It was a miracle, they said, that she still survived, for her bones were starting from her flesh, her skin was like leather, her voice almost inaudible. Yet she lived on, fighting for life like the half-god she was, and for ever mumbling phrases about new rules and restrictions.

She was discovered in a heavy sleep one morning—it was a kind of stupor. Evening came, and she lay there as before. They thought the end was at hand. Then she rallied, and seemed to be refreshed. To Fattuta, bending over her, she whispered :

'Listen to these words, and mark them. Hidden below the couch is a bag of rubies from the Colocynthians——'

'Oh, Madam!' Fattuta began in that impulsive way of hers. 'Rubies! How very dreadful. Don't you know that all such things are forbidden here? Rubies! Into the river with them!'

As in former days, Symira gathered strength from resistance. A spark of her old spirit flared up.

'You ought to know better, Fattuta, than to make a fuss with a dying woman about a handful of stones. They must have been overlooked, somehow. Since they are there . . .'

It was the merest flicker. She collapsed, and only after a long time did she find sufficient force to add, in the ghost of a voice :

'Sell them, and build a fair monument to my memory in the courtyard and lay me underneath it. I want to be remembered . . . remembered . .'

Her breathing came faster ; she grew restless and raved continuously. Even Fattuta could not understand what was on her mind. The struggle went on till, by an effort of strength, or maybe without knowing what she did, she suddenly raised herself into a rigid sitting posture. Her face was all distorted, her fists were clenched, and a look of terror had come into those wonderful eyes.

'Such horrid dreams, Fattuta ! About horses . . .'

The ex-Mistress of the Doves bowed her head, and wiped away a funny little tear. She murmured :

'I 've always tried to keep you straight, Madam.'

Symira had dropped back, lifeless, on the couch.

So ended a great Queen, the first goddess-heroine known to human kind. Perhaps nobody was sorry to see her go. Certain it is that nobody, despite that bag of rubies, has ever been able to point out her last resting-place.

NONE can tell where she lies buried.

In the seclusion of that House she was forgotten for the time being ; she had outlived herself, having never made her influence felt beyond its walls. The few who still took interest in Symira supposed that the body was cast at night by some of the discontented members of her flock into the river, to drift away with other offal and glut the crocodiles that swarmed on those mud-banks lower down ; they supposed that the more devoted ones, seeing there was no help for it, acquiesced in what had happened and held their peace. Be that as it may, no seemly monument was reared to her memory in the courtyard or anywhere else.

For hardly had she breathed her last before the Sixty-Nine Good Ones discovered what they thought a better use for those gems. They would dispose of them in the market and, with the money, give themselves an entertainment, a small supper, in honour of their dead Mistress. What more reasonable ? And what more natural than that the proposal

should emanate from the kind-hearted Fattuta, who understood and loved her sisters like no one else? She made them a little speech proving that the Queen would have been pleased with this idea and was, indeed, on the point of suggesting it herself had she not died just one moment too soon; that in every case the living came before the dead, and what was the use of making oneself ill about anything?

'I 'm sure,' she added, 'a little change is what we want. Speaking for myself, I 've had enough goodness for the present. It 's worn me to a skeleton, I declare . . .' and she patted her round belly in confirmation, while the others shrieked with laughter.

There was no squabbling, no opposition on this point. They all felt an immense relief at the demise of the strict Symira and an immense desire to relapse, if only for one evening, into something like their former ways. The speech roused their half-forgotten natures; it was wildly applauded.

In the matter of that handful of stones the Good Ones were woefully defrauded by the merchants. Gold enough, none the less, was produced to furnish an entertainment such as would have ravished the heart of Symira in

the days before she fell a victim to the epidemic. They decided that it should take place at night-time and, as the weather happened to be hot and breathless, in that spacious court-yard where the Doves were wont to perform their amorous pranks for the delectation of bashful youths and of others who were not so bashful.

All was necessarily bought afresh ; the place was carpeted and its trees hung with lamps of many-tinted light. To conjure up memories of the past, a raised platform for dancing stood at one end, with musical instruments such as they once knew how to handle. There were tables, and couches for repose, and soft cushions of rare workmanship ; as to the viands and wines—the market was emptied of its choicest delicacies ; out of sheer greediness they bought five times more than was needful. The sight of these wonderful things reminded them of bygone times, and all were grateful to the good Queen not only for dying, but for her prudence in keeping back those jewels without which nothing could have been done.

' How thoughtful of the old carrion ! ' they said. ' All these years we have never danced or sung or laughed or kissed a man ! We have been dressed like mangy cows ! We

have eaten muck, and never enough of it! Why not behave rationally, for once in a way? We can always repent again, if we like.'

Soon the preparations were complete and afternoon drew nigh. They had bedaubed their faces with white and red paint to hide the wrinkles, they had bought gaily coloured sashes; a few courageous ones even went so far as to wash and perfume their bodies, a thing unheard of in the days of Symira. Yet Fattuta, observing all this, shook her head and remained profoundly dissatisfied. The main thing, in her opinion, was lacking. She therefore took thought and out of sheer good nature determined to prepare a surprise for the others, in order that the small entertainment should be as perfect as possible. With this end in view she paid a hurried and secret visit to that relative who was so deeply indebted to her, the Captain of the dead Queen's bodyguard. To him, after due salutation, the ex-Mistress of the Doves set forth her project. He enquired:

'One for each of you, dear cousin? That makes sixty-nine. Certainly, certainly. I am only too glad to have this little chance of obliging you, who have done so much for me and perhaps saved all our lives. Besides, it

will be a delightful change for the poor fellows to pass an evening in your company.'

'You flatterer!' she replied. 'Now listen, my good man. We may want a few spare ones as well, in case——'

'They never shirk their duty,' he declared. 'But have it your way. Take a few more; take the whole troop, if you have room for them.'

'Thank you, dear Captain; I think we have. If not, we 'll make room. By the way, what do you suggest about payment? We girls are not exactly fools, you know. We quite understand that at our time of life——'

He broke in:

'Sound food, and plenty of it, is all my men require for these little outings. Roast lamb and bread and wine; then some grapes and cheeses and more wine. As much wine as you please! But let me implore you, dear Fattuta, no money or trinkets or anything of that kind. They have a good deal of modesty for all their manliness, and a good deal of pride into the bargain, and I should not like to see their fine natures corrupted.'

'As you wish,' answered the other, 'though that was never my way of treating friends and clients. I always like men to go away

thoroughly happy ; it makes them want to come again. I like to give them everything short of my dress, and that too, if they take a fancy to it. They 've only to ask for it, the dears ! May we count on your coming as well ? '

The Captain surmised what might be expected of him and with many apologies and fair words excused himself from personal attendance, alleging a certain indisposition which aroused Fattuta's motherly concern. So the affair was settled to her satisfaction, and presently she rose to depart. She bade him farewell, thanking him for his kindness and adding :

' Now do take care of yourself, Captain dear. Believe me, these little things are apt to be troublesome, unless you know what to do and have the patience to do it. And you 're looking so well, too . . . never saw you looking better . . .'

A GOOD few of the ancient courtezans were ailing and therefore unable to take part in the repast whch began soon after sunset ; they looked down enviously from their chambers upon what was passing in the hot courtyard below. The rest of them, ignorant of the surprise which Fattuta had planned, began the evening rather primly with civil little speeches about each other's dresses and so forth ; soon they were carousing to their hearts' content. The effect was rapid and disastrous. Their stomachs, accustomed to abstinence, revolted at this abundance of good fare ; the wine went to their heads. In briefest space of time all of them were pretty far gone. They loosened their girdles ; the paint ran off their flushed old faces ; some of the reckless ones were already tottering or sprawling about, others tried a little dancing or babbled feverishly or sang songs.

One of the latter, who in years gone by had often been called to grace the merchants' suppers on account of her facetious verses and naughty little ways, now sat in a corner by

herself, crooning a drunken ditty that never ended and that nobody could hear, to the accompaniment of a psaltery which she twanged with gouty fingers. None of them paid any attention to her.

'I wish you 'd listen when I 'm singing,' she complained. 'It 's very, very unkind not to listen when a poor girl tries to amuse her friends.'

Nobody listened. There was too much noise. They were skipping about and chattering, everybody at the same time.

'Now please do listen, and just sing it too. This is how it goes: "We won't repent no more again, not we !——"'

Even those nearest to her caught nothing but a few snatches like this, and another one about 'We 've had our dose of goodness, haven't we? We won't——'

'She doesn't know what we want,' said one of these to her companion. 'But I do. We want a few men about here. Just to talk to, I mean.'

'Just to talk to? Only to talk to? I 'd talk to them !'

At this moment was heard a thunderous knocking outside; it was like an earthquake. The ex-Mistress of the Doves rose to open the

portal, and there entered ninety-nine guards, marching steadily by threes and threes, till the courtyard could hold no more. They drew up in order and gave the military salute to the company, like hefty fellows who mean to do their duty. Fattuta enquired triumphantly of her sisters :

'What do you say to this, my dears ?'

Then she turned to the men :

'Now boys, no compliments and don't be shy. Eat. That 's the first thing you 've got to do.'

The guards needed no encouragement. They set to eating and drinking in good style ; they warmed to their work amid cheers and a shower of playful little jokes on the part of their kind hostesses. None the less, Fattuta's trained eye noticed something wrong—a group of the younger or more rustic ones who were evidently not at their ease, having perhaps never been invited to refined entertainments like this one. They behaved in a puzzled, half-hearted sort of fashion. By way of making them feel more at home, she called out : 'Just watch me, you children over there !' and clambered up to the dancing platform, where she began to toss crazy limbs and rolls of fat about in all directions, twisting that

shapeless body into such attitudes that even the most ingenuous of them soon realized that here was a spectacle worth watching, and worth applauding.

'Ouf!' she suddenly cried, 'it's too hot for clothes . . .' down fluttered the little scarlet rag she was wearing. Presently she wobbled after it.

'Sweating all over! I declare I can't dance any more, but I can still kiss a soldier'; and therewith tumbled herself into the lap of the nearest one. So the fun began. The guards, unclasping their belts on account of the heat, turned their attention from the viands to the providers of so remarkable a feast. How poor Symira would have relished the proceedings, had she not fallen a victim to bad habits and that tiresome attack of hers!

In such exquisite fashion the hours sped along, one after the other. Midnight came and went. The lamps were sputtering feebly. Soon there was darkness overhead and on earth a quiet; a quiet broken only by occasional hiccups, or a sham little scream . . .

And now sallow morning crept into the courtyard. A few city folk were already astir, when the guards nudged each other, buckled up their belts, and, conceiving that

sound food, and plenty of it, was not adequate remuneration for a sleepless night and for services such as they had rendered, took to ransacking in silence the whole building for whatever might suit their ends. They even searched the persons of their generous entertainers, turning them over this way and that in modest soldierly style, as though they were so many dead sheep. Then, leaving the frail creatures drowned in lust and wine, they opened the gate and went their way, marching out steadily by threes and threes, each with a bundle under his arm, like men who have done their duty.

All unaware of what had happened, the Sixty-Nine Good Ones continued to strew the ground in wanton tangles, with grey hair jumbled about their faces and withered limbs exposed to view, snoring, groaning and belching in their sleep, vomiting gently on carpets and cushions, till the Sun shone directly overhead.

So ended a small entertainment in honour of a great Queen.

DURING that same sultry day another commemorative festival, on a less pretentious scale, had taken place elsewhere. It happened to be the anniversary of the occasion on which Linus, whom both the aged Satyrs remembered with affection, used to visit the Forbidden Hill and partake of their cheer ; they had observed the day in a half-pensive, half-solemn style ever since his death. A good many years had passed since then ; many mortals had come and gone. And here they were, surviving it all, like tough old oaks that have weathered a thousand storms and are yet not sapless.

Afternoon drew on apace while they reclined, each with a chaplet of gay flowers wreathed about his horns, under that arbour from whose shady roof depended bunches of grapes, ripe and yellow. From this eminence they could look down through the foliage of trees into a limitless, sweltering plain ; at their back was heard a sound pleasant on days like this—the plash of the fountain which issued from one side of their rose-tinted abode.

Now the repast was ended and, Nea-huni having come forward with some gourds of wine, they took to discussing in their old-fashioned, sententious manner, the ways of gods and mortals.

Their memories, as usual, went back to Linus. He, a half-god, had been teachable; he performed his task. He had grafted a city upon the stony wilderness and bidden the waters flow in dry places. To what purpose? The glory of it was already crumbling to ashes. A flower that blossomed for a day: such was the realm of Linus. Where would this end? For Linyas ruled at present, a weak and womanish creature. Linyas—what a master for mortals!

'Strange,' Nea-huni was saying, 'that craving to have a master of any kind. I never had it.'

'Neither did I,' replied Azdhubal. 'It must be an uncomfortable feeling.'

So the talk proceeded, along the old lines; how mortals were hard to teach and full of miserable ailments of body; how they changed their purposes, jumping from one excess into another . . .

'Hotter than usual,' remarked Azdhubal. 'What can have happened to the Wind lately?'

'He spends a good deal of his time at Eskion.'

'So he does! I forgot about that last little caprice of his.'

'Or hers.'

Then came the turn of the gods, male and female: their inconstancies and immoderation. More changeful even than mortals! The gods . . . they were not to be taken seriously. He of the Earth, for all his occasional civilities, had lately surpassed himself in waywardness; he had let Aroudi out again, just for fun. Now where would that end? And the Great Father himself, with his recent and most abominable trick for muddling the brains of human kind . .

'Observe, Azdhubal, what is happening. They are neglecting their tasks, and letting city and country go to ruin, and hacking each other in pieces, because they cannot come to an understanding about good and evil. The simpletons, to draw lines where no line can be drawn, to go delving into themselves, instead of into the world around them. What have they done? They have invented two words. What do they think to have done? They think to have discovered two things. If they had the wit to see through their witless

gods, they would know better than to tear the spirit away from that body which should be its guide and friend; they would soon realize that nothing is good for the one save what also benefits the other, and that nothing can be a bane to the one unless it harms the other at the same time. Is there anything easier to understand? . . . I fear it was all a generous kind of mistake—my belief in their poor little intelligence. They are hopeless. Oh, Azdhubal, I am tired of them.'

'I have always been tired of them.'

'I am more than tired. I am in despair about them.'

'My good Nea-huni, they are not worth despairing about.'

'And how I used to give them advice and comfort,' he went on, 'and cure their ignobl sicknesses! How I lived for them, instead of . . .'

He sighed gently, and took a despondent sip out of his goblet. Azdhubal suggested:

'Instead of throwing them to the crocodiles——'

'And living for myself.'

There was a pause in their talk, while the Sun sank lower and lower behind a curtain of sulphurous haze. An air of weariness, of

menacing stagnation, exhaled from the teeming level at their feet. All life seemed to be held in suspense. Only in the northern parts could thunder be heard muttering among blue-black clouds that swathed the distant hilltops ; lightning in restless flickers played about their folds. They saw the network of lazy canals down there, some of them choked up with luxuriance of rank verdure ; they saw the stream that bore their waters to the sea, crawling sullenly onwards in leaden-coloured coils. And not a breath of air ! A few wrinkled leaves were already lying scattered upon the ground. Autumn, and the agony of another year, had commenced in a hot, death-like stillness.

Nea-huni remarked :

'And now the Colocynthians have been overrun, and their elaborate arts wiped out ; after all the trouble we took with them. So much for mortals and their works. What did you once say, Azdhubal ? It will end in smoke.'

'Did I say that ? '

Suddenly, as if some inspiration had come to him, Azdhubal rose to his feet and said :

'I shall go and fight over there. Oh, not for the sake of the Colocynthians ! For

the sake of the fighting. I am getting rusty. My muscles need bracing up. Just look at them——'

He stretched out his limbs, one after the other, and drew his hand over them, shaking his head disapprovingly.

'These legs,' he said, 'have never been so flabby in all my life. A little bout will do them no harm.'

'Please don't,' said Nea-huni. 'You are older than you were; you might have your other horn knocked off, and that would be a disaster. Yes; a disaster, because . . . shall I tell you something I never yet told you? Shall I? Then listen. How true it is that the Great Father created mortals in his own image, fickle and lustful! Now wherein does our image differ from that of these two? Ah, you have guessed it. And therefore our peculiar virtue must reside in our horns or, maybe, in something of which they are the outward mark or symbol. That has been my secret conviction ever since . . . ever since . . .' he broke off, as though undecided whether or not to express his thoughts. Then added: 'Do you think as I do? Because, if so, there can be no doubt about the matter. It is inconceivable that we should both be wrong.'

'Not the least doubt,' replied Azdhubal. 'You are perfectly right. And the proof is this : ever since that little accident to my left one, I have changed. I am more testy and absent-minded than I used to be. Have you noticed it ? '

' Oh, Azdhubal, I notice nothing in you that is not to my liking, and your testiness, as you call it, is the delight of my heart. But, now that you mention the affair . . . why, yes ; the subtle change in your nature after that accident was precisely what gave me the idea. So please don't risk your remaining horn in a fight. I should not like to see you turn into either god or mortal. Neither know what they want.'

Evening was closing in amid a drowsy hush, and the heat had grown to be stifling as the breath of an oven. A smoulder of light still hung about the western regions ; those golden gleams had faded out of grape-clusters overhead ; tree-tops, lower down, were losing the cheery tints of day-time. And now shadows crept out of their corners to overrun the land. It was the hour of dusk, the hour of musing and wistfulness. Nea-huni, lost in dreams, seemed disinclined for further talk. The other, whose eye had been scanning the steamy distances, began thoughtfully :

'Aroudi . . . he is different. He knows what he wants. Tell me, Nea-huni, will he get it?'

'I think he will get it. I think we shall live to see him get it. And yet I may be sorry when they go, the poor fools; I have grown so accustomed to them and their little miseries. Go they must. They are past our aid; they cannot stand alone, like us. And where two or three are gathered together, there the mischief begins . . . So drink, old friend! Drink to our friendship, the only thing worth living for, and the only thing worth fighting for, and the only thing that suffers no change; drink to the confusion of both gods and mortals. Really, I don't know which of the two is more contemptible.'

'Neither do I,' declared Azdhubal. Then, raising the cup to his lips, he said solemnly:

'To the crocodiles, with both of them!'

END

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